AN EXPERIMENT IN PERFECTION

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To My Brother

F. P. D.

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CHAPTER I

I WAS going to play tennis with the Hatch girls. But I think I'd rather stay here and talk with you."

Sallie Howe made this announcement with somewhat uncertain tones, as if her affection for her friend vied with her devotion to tennis. "I'm in a nice mood, too," she added engagingly.

Still the girl to whom these remarks were addressed took no heed of them, so engrossed was she in her own work.

"Talk *with* you, did I say? I might better have put it, talk *at* you." She stood on the porch of her father's home, racket in hand, dressed from the rim of her smart linen stock collar to the soles of her duck ties in fresh, immaculate whiteness. It was plain that she wanted some sign or word of encouragement that should decide the question of her morning's occupation for her. But her friend, who sat sewing in a low porch rocker, did not raise her eyes from the length of damask towelling, across one end of which her supple fingers embroidered an Old English "L."

Sallie gave a sigh that might have expressed abject boredom or hopeless despair. Then she sank indolently into the pillowed depth of a not distant rocker and laid her new tennis racket across her piqué lap with elaborate care. Still the busy one stitched on, mute. Sallie squirmed her shoulders into a position of complete ease, eyed her companion speculatively, and then tried, "He's immensely wealthy. It's too good a chance to let slip. I adore rich men! Really, one of us *must* marry him! It doesn't so much matter which, because we're such good friends, you know."

This extraordinary statement had the desired effect.

"How profane!" The voice was low, but vibrant with conviction.

Sallie's quaint face slid into a smile of extreme amusement; but since her friend failed to look up from the embroidery, she went on with the odd little drawl that always characterised her more intimate speech. "Profanity it may sound to you. You're always so sure of yourself and your future and your Jerry¡ But to me the situation is little less than tragical. Always I'm dangled on the brink of uncertainty! Really, Persis, I never knew a girl who took so much for granted from destiny as you do! At times you are positively insolent in your assumption of fixity."

Even this very personal remark failed to draw a reply from the quiet one, beyond a whimsical little smile that played around the corners of her mouth. So Sallie elaborated her point.

"I suppose it all comes of loving one man since infancy and growing up with the idea that you're going to marry him and nobody else. As for me, I like the excitement of winning a man in open tournament! Still," and her voice grew mournful, "I know perfectly well that if I worked from now till Easter after Doom's Day I'd never be able to win Jim Kimberley. I'm too homely! To win out I'd have to be as beautiful as you are!"

The girl thus exalted now made reply with all seriousness, "I think you quite comely, Sallie. Of course, you haven't much physique, but you have a little way with you that's quite appealing."

It was evident that these two girls had reached the stage of friendship where, aside from feeling no need of conversation, they dared to be frank with each other.

"Ah—thank you! But I should like to be so preëminent that even my enemies would be forced to grant that I'm beautiful. It has never been a source of contentment to me to just eat with my mouth and see with my eyes! I shall never forgive

my parents for their complaisance in making me normal without one scrap of beauty!" And she brought her tennis racket down across her left knee with as much vigour as she ever put into any unnecessary act of life.

"Really, Persis, you might show some slight interest in my hopeless aspirations and dire afflictions," she added reproachfully, "and beside—I'm trying to be entertaining."

"I'm immeasurably interested! Do go on! Who is this paragon of wealth and fascination and ticklishness that so harrows the virgin soil of your heart?"

Having piqued her friend's interest and so gained her point, Sallie did not seem in any hurry to disclose the identity of her charmer. She made a lazy pass at a stray branch of purple wistaria vine that the June breeze had detached from its orbit around the veranda rail. "I had a letter from Nellie Darrach this morning," she announced engagingly.

"Indeed? But what has that got to do with ill-fated love affairs? Tell me, instead, about Jim Kimberley."

"But I'd much rather tell you about Nellie Darrach," Sallie drawled.

"Never mind. I'd rather hear about Jim."

"You're so very wilful," Sallie muttered. "Very well, then. Jim Kimberley is my second cousin."

"You certainly have been discreet about sharing him. All these years I've known you and no sound of him till now! Why have you never told me about him before?"

"Because he's been in Asia ever since I knew you. And because"—she hesitated a moment—"because six years ago I fell desperately in love with him and have spent most of the time since trying to forget him. I defy any woman to long withstand his charms."

"Surely I'm invulnerable. Go on! I may be able to give you some good advice!"

"There now! I never knew an engaged girl yet who didn't

regard herself high tribunal on all matters of love!" And she emerged from the ease of her rocker with, "Honestly, Persis, you make me nervous with your eternal embroidery! If I don't watch out you'll be doing 'L's' on all my damask, too, just from habit! Put away your drudgery and come out into the garden with me." She stooped and touched her lips fondly to the spot on her friend's hair where the sunshine glinted a copperish brown.

The caress made the busy one look up responsively; it became evident how beautiful Persis Litchfield was. Her sewing posture somewhat cramped her height, but her face was singularly expressive and handsome. Moreover, if Sallie had been anything of an analyst she would have seen in the upturned face some marks of very contradictory emotions, as well as beauty. However, the faculty of analysis was the farthest possible trait of Sallie's mind. She was always able to arrive at very swift and shrewd conclusions about the subject in hand; but she arrived by means of a high grade of intuition, rather than by power of logic. And so now she saw only a guest to be entertained, a beautiful girl with gray eyes and sunny hair, of whom she was extravagantly proud and fond.

"Sit there beside me, child, while I decapitate this rose bush. How beautiful you are there with the greenery and buds of that crimson rambler framing you! You're so very ravishing—you're all June and Harvard! What woful irony that I'm only Sallie Howe instead of Jerry Wadhams!

"If you want to know something, I'm bored blue with the seashore," she confided. "Every year since I saw daylight, it has been my dear daddy's unaccountable and pet notion that I spend my summers on Jersey coast. I haven't the heart to distress said daddy's feelings by open revolt against what he loves. It's a case for tact and high diplomacy! Half the art of life lies in getting your own way without hurting anybody's feelings."

The would-be exemplary snipped away at her roses. "I'm bored to extinction with the cock-sparrow man! Who wants to go sailing on the same ocean, in the same boat, with the same man forever? Not Sallie Howe! Give me variety or give me Nirvana! You see, it's this way: Jim's mother has invited me on to Boston to spend a month with her. She does noble deeds like that for her poor relations occasionally—after she has treated herself to four years of Asian splendour! But this trip her invitation comes as a perfect godsend. It gives me a chance to escape the ennui of the beach and the cock-sparrow man, and what's more to the point, it gives me a second shot at Jim, now that I know better how to deal with him. *Are* you interested, Persis?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Very well! I'm merely going to get on the soft side of father and work on his generosity. Graciously, for twenty-three years have I pampered him on the beach question. This year you will please watch me outwit him! I plan to wheedle him into urging me to go to Boston, doubling my allowance, and escorting me in to the ten-o'clock 'Limited.' " And Sallie looked entirely efficient to arrange anything that could be accomplished by amiable means.

Persis leaned back against the bench, the sunshine full upon her. Her head was well set on her shoulders, and her features were set on her face unerringly, as breeding does it. Oval contour, low, wide forehead, misty gray eyes, slender lips and delicate lines of sensitiveness around the nostrils: there was hardly a flaw in the symmetry and beauty of her face. Its pallor furthered the impression of breeding, and, while it suggested an indefinite mournfulness, spoke less of ill health than of the fineness of her cell structure in general. Then came the contradictions—the suggestion of sadness contrasting oddly with the lines of mirth around the mouth; the well cut, generous mouth that scorned just as readily as it smiled and hinted of

small mercy for mistakes, whether of her own or other people's commission. Such a mouth might be very unforgiving as well as adorable. Her hair was not beautiful, except for the fineness of its texture. It was neither abundant nor wavy, and she wore it plain, almost of necessity, parted in the middle and coiled low at the back of her neck. When a chance bit of sunshine fell on it, its brown became copper. What gave Persis Litchfield the redeeming impression of warmth, what vouched for a living emotion beneath the habitual silence and studied calm of her bearing, was her eyes. With the least possible sparkle in them, large, gray, and quiet, often immobile in their long gaze, their expression, when she turned them on one earnestly, seemed to touch one's flesh like a slow caress. Their aloof ardour was the utmost refinement of fire and feeling.

Altogether this girl gave an impression of contradiction, pride, and capacity. Just in what form her capacity would eventually find expression would not be easy to foretell. For she represented a high individualism, which is only another name for selfishness; and at the same time a latent generosity in her nature seemed to forbid her to make mistakes of a sordid kind, or to take more than she gave.

"I've got to go home next week, you know. Wouldn't it be grand if we could go together?"

"Persis, you're an oracle! That's just what we'll do. Won't it be like college days when you used to visit me?"

Then the silence of good understanding settled over them, till Persis asked for what she would not take a few minutes ago. "I had to think a minute to recall who Nellie Darrach is—she stayed such a little while at Wellesley. How is she putting in her time?"

"Oh, boarding! Nellie dotes on boarding-houses—says they're such an escape from the slavishness of housekeeping. She actually doesn't care enough for her home to take the trouble to keep it going. And as some spiteful fate has it she

is married to Calvin Darrach, the most domestic man imaginable, who worships every idea of home-life and housekeeping—even the bills."

"Sallie, tell me honestly how many marriages have you seen that at all impressed you as rational?"

"I don't know any! All my life I've kept my eyes peeled for such a combination. They all start right—apparently! Then those that destiny doesn't upset take matters into their own hands and upset themselves. Much entertainment and zest I've found watching them do it! Still I'm on the look-out for the perfect pair, and always the joy is in the finding. If you'll pardon me, I've always thought that you and Jerry are singularly well mated."

"Thank you," a trifle haughtily.

"Friendship aside, Persis, just as a biological feat, I'm tremendously interested to watch how you two are going to play off the game. I'm banking on you, let me add."

"You do us honour! I shall hope that neither of us disappoint you. Now tell me where Nellie Darrach and her husband live."

"Oh, they live up in York State, in a pretty little suburb of the City. But now I'm only interested in you and Jerry. Really, Persis, you were never meant for a minister's wife, as well matched as you and Jerry are in other ways. To begin with, you aren't good enough," she added, with the air of fond raillery that she always assumed with her friend.

They were bantering words, but they hurt. "You're twisting the knife, Sallie."

"Forgive! I never meant it. I never understood till now how much Jerry's change meant to you. Wasn't it strange—so sudden—so unlike him!"

Sallie drew her forehead down into a perplexed frown; no shadow ever sat long on her spirit, however, and in a moment she said cheerily, "Never mind, dear. It's sure to come out right. It must! Jerry is too clever to fail in anything he sets

his heart on. And as for you—nothing is too perfect! You are doomed to splendour, Persis! You can't miss it."

Persis, somewhat cheered, smiled a response. Perhaps this one trait of responsiveness was what most endeared her to her friends; it certainly redeemed much that might have seemed sad and unyielding in her.

The cloud did not entirely pass from the face. From the depths of her white leather belt Sallie produced a heavy gold fob. "Come!" she said gayly. "In ten minutes there'll a surprise happen for you—something you love, too." She gathered her roses into her lap, held up her skirt to contain them, and sending Persis back to the veranda, stopped to leave an order in the kitchen.

Presently around the corner of the veranda came the sound of dancing feet. A groom appeared leading two black ponies, bridled and saddled. Their polished coats absorbed the sunshine, radiating it transmuted into abundant life; arching their pretty necks, they sidestepped daintily down the gravel driveway.

"If I don't keep an eye on you, you'll take root in that sewing chair and some day produce nothing but a crop of Old English 'L's.' "

The girl whose future was thus graphically foretold threw back her head and gave a merry laugh.

"That's more like my friend Persis," Sallie approved. "Come—while we're in the mood!"

She held out her hand and they went upstairs together.

Presently she appeared at her guest's door. "We'll not bother with hats."

"Won't the neighbours think us queer if we go bareheaded?" asked the cautious one.

"Never mind the neighbours! We'll rest in the arms of father's social and moral unimpeachableness. Are you 'most ready?"

The ponies set off up the avenue at a smart pace. For a few moments the girls let them have their will, out of the sheer joy of the rhythm of motion. Then Persis, bridlewise, brought her Abdallah alongside and announced, "Now I'm ready to hear some more about Jim Kimberley."

Sallie grinned. "Well, you're in the habit of getting what you want, aren't you?" After a moment's thought she asked, "Do you remember the Mr. Kimberley on the board of trustees at Wellesley? He's Jim's father. The Kimberleys always make an event of Commencement week. So, now Mrs. Kimberley, as a sop for all the good times she did me out of when, as father's cousin, she ought to have been placing me high amongst the Boston nobility instead of touring Asia, suggests a coaching party to the college in my honour."

"How I envy you!"

"Don't do that! You're to meet us there. I should never allow you to miss our first class reunion."

A peanut man ambled across the avenue, shoving a push-cart. With a snort of scorn the ponies curvetted up on to the curb, and reminded of their manners by a good cut from the riding crops set off at a full gallop. When they quieted down to a gait conducive to confidences, Persis asked, "How does he look?"

"Altogether handsome. He's dark-skinned as an Indian and has great gray eyes—exactly like yours! If you want to know something, that's why I first liked you!"

Persis laughed and flicked her pony with her crop.

"Shall I go on?"

"Yes."

"Jim has lived in every capital of Europe and spent most of his youth in Asia. Consequently he's a mixture of foreign vice and New England propriety. That sounds hopeless, doesn't it? Well, his luxury-loving soul makes him more so! But he has the most perfect manners toward his mother, of any man I

know. And he plays the piano—oh! how he can play! You'd take him for the twin brother of Saint Cecilia!

"There is a family story that once when Jim was a ten-year-old his music-master set him to practice a very difficult and beautiful piece of music. The child failed to satisfy himself, to give it just the touch of perfection that his music-loving soul demanded. He tried over and over again, and each time missed his technique. At last in a tempest of impatience, he seized the small bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius that happened to stand near, and with all the strength of his puny, enraged little body, threw it crashing into the piano. The keys flew in ivory splinters in all directions. One sharp piece struck the child and cut his right wrist badly. To this day you can see the scar. Jim is very sensitive to any disfigurement, and always keeps his right hand well out of sight. When he plays difficult music it hurts him yet."

Any tale of suffering, especially the unnecessary, wilful varieties, always moved Persis's sympathy deeply. She did not speak again until they reached the summit.

"Is Jim a college graduate?"

"Yes. He's a Harvard man."

"How old is he?"

"He was thirty-five the eighth of last May."

"If he's Harvard Jerry will know him."

Sallie hastened to amend such a possibility. "Never! He was there long before Jerry's day! It's 'most luncheon time. Let's take the bridle-path home."

When the girls slid out of their saddles Sallie exclaimed, "What a lot we've accomplished this morning! The best of our summer all planned! My escape from the beach is what did it. I'm going to Boston and you're going with me. You're going to Wellesley and Jim is going to meet you. It's a beautiful cycle—only it leaves out Jerry! Why don't you write and ask him to work off his horrid examinations early

enough to join us all at Commencement? With such a magnificent pair we couldn't miss a good time if we tried."

Persis scintillated with joy. "What a brilliant stroke! I'll write this minute." And gathering up her habit she dashed for upstairs.

"Hold on! It's time to eat! Mail trains run after luncheon, dear!"

CHAPTER II

NELLIE DARRACH was a Baltimore girl and first cousin to Sallie Howe. Between them had always been a rivalry, based on Nellie's beauty and Sallie's clothes. Two maiden aunts championed and informed this cousinly game of tit-for-tat, which played off about even until the time came for the girls to go to college. Then Sallie's wit had prevailed over Nellie's graces, and after two months of abject homesickness and the unwonted responsibilities and obligations of college routine, Nellie had dropped out of her class and devoted her frailer energies to the study of art at the Boston Art League. In turn, after one year of desultory and intermittent work in this new bewilderment, she had met Calvin Darrach, a young New Yorker, and as an escape from her incapacity, had married him, not without a suitable display of triumph over her cousin's brain matter.

The balance of Nellie's nature tipped toward over-nicety. Just as her dainty ways became finicalness, so her femininism verged on the oversexed. Her whole philosophy of life hinged on this chance element of being. Just as she tyrannised over Calvin Darrach because she was his wife, so she shirked all the obligations and business of life on the ground of her femininity. When she was eighteen, admiring men had referred to her complexion as "peaches and cream": the musical members of her troop of suitors had sung songs to the "forget-me-nots" in her eyes. This was preëminently the kind of effect Nellie desired to have on the opposite sex, and made her marriage with big, level-headed Calvin Darrach the more remarkable. Already at twenty-five the blue of her eyes was beginning to pale; and around her thin lips and sallow nostrils, under the

prominences of her delicate cheeks, small worries and selfward impulses were beginning to network the fruity quality of her skin with tiny wrinkles. About her mouth was coming a droopy expression, like that of a spoiled child who gets what she wants by crying for it. But despite these incipient marks of early fade she still maintained her reputation for blond beauty by the glory and abundance of her hair. If her cheeks were taking on depressions, the gold in her locks remained undimmed, the admiration of men and the envy of women, especially of her cousin Sallie. While her art course had resulted in no masterpieces, it had chastened her tastes and taught her how to surround herself with colour effects, that while emphasising her blondness, still conserved what colouring she had. And about her manners, clothes, and speech there were never lacking the elusive marks of refinement.

If Sallie Howe had wished revenge for her cousin's last triumph in the game of rivalry, she might have found it in the way Nellie bungled the art of matrimony. But Sallie had the least possible leaning toward anything as violent as revenge, and instead she amused herself endlessly by watching Nellie's mistakes, in them finding perpetual food for sarcasm and repartee. She never conversed long without giving her own picturesque version of the Darrach situation, or describing some new phase of Nellie's tactics and mismanagement.

The ten o'clock "Limited" from the Grand Central Station was swinging along past the indentations of the Sound, when Sallie cried, "I wonder how Father will ever endure the seashore without me? I am a wicked one to go off and leave him all alone, when he's so lovely to me."

Persis laid down her book. "I wouldn't despond about him, if I were you. There are plenty of women at the beach who will see to it that a man as attractive as your father isn't lonely."

"How unpleasant of you to suggest such odious

possibilities when I'm so powerless to help myself here! It's too late now! Anyway, I'm glad I did it—the horrid little cock-sparrow man! I mean to celebrate my freedom from him by having just the gayest kind of a time. I shall flirt desperately with Jim Kimberley and make *him* care this trip. I'll dangle his emotions in mid-air for a month, and just as I'm leaving I'll tell him I only meant to be cousinly. That's what he tol ł me six years ago."

Persis laughed and inquired, "Why only a month of suspense for Jim—why not longer?"

"Because I lack the sufficiently moody temperament, the lights and shades that fascinate him. And beside, I'm homely." She gazed down the length of the car and caught sight of herself in the mirror. "Oh dear," she groaned disconsolately, "I wish I wasn't so homely! It makes me very sad!"

"I like the velvet in your eyes. Your teeth are perfect. And I admire the queer little way you do your hair."

"I loathe my hair!" Her fierceness quite outdid the drawl. "Every other cousin in our family has good looks but me—and I adore beauty so! There's Nellie Darrach. Even she, in spite of her narrow, peevish disposition, has beautiful hair. If she hadn't put in all her youth fretting and stewing over imaginary ailments till her face is all puckered up like a shrivelled apple, she'd be quite good-looking. As 'tis, she is better-looking than I am."

"Would you trade looks with her if you had to take her disposition?"

Sallie turned this alternative over in her mind well before she replied, "I'd be willing to put up with almost anything, if I had Cal Darrach thrown in! Really, Persis, he's my ideal of a man—excepting Jerry."

Persis smiled indulgently.

"Anyway, Cal is as perfect as men come in this world. He's as charming as Jim Kimberley, without his badness. And he's

as clever as Jerry without his impracticability. Then he's quite his own adorable, unspoiled self. How Nellie ever snared such a prize is beyond the limits of my wildest fancy!" She sighed with the burden of her inability to understand life's incongruities. "There's my face again in that mirror! Would you mind changing chairs with me so I needn't keep seeing myself all the while?"

Persis made the desired move, and Sallie settled down with her back to the offending mirror. "Thank you. That is a relief!"

"I'll tell you one thing," she added presently: "if you ever make such a mess of marriage as Nell has, I'll shake you till your eye-teeth rattle." Sallie was very droll when she assumed severity. The disparity now between her sternness and her good-nature made Persis laugh.

"Did I ever tell you about Nell's home? Calvin gave her the handsomest house in Bentley for a wedding present. He built it for her, on a hill with a superb outlook. Well, they lived in it just six months, when Nell decided she wasn't 'strong' enough to keep house! She had three servants to help her run it, and the best of everything—but it wasn't enough for Nell. The end of her decision was that she stored her furniture, rented the house, and hustled poor home-loving Cal off to a boarding-house, where she has held him captive to her whims ever since. The truth is she prefers to idle away her life on the front piazza of some fashionable boarding-house, discussing the weather, the infirmities of the inmates, and the latest pattern of drawn-work."

"Perhaps she thinks her husband can't afford to keep up such an expensive establishment," Persis offered.

"What a shark you are at reading motives! It's Nell's latest hallucination that Calvin can't *afford* to run a home! I notice, though, she doesn't deny herself many luxuries. My dear, Calvin Darrach is treasurer of a big steel company, and must

get a salary around ten thousand dollars. That ought to keep two people off the rocks of harrowing poverty and insure Nell against the racking, benumbing cares of housework. She'd never have to pare potatoes for dinner or build the fires! Still, the illusion of scant means clings to Nellie, and behold her boarding because her husband is too poor to run a home! If it weren't so rough on poor Calvin it would be funny. She has another idiosyncrasy which regards her health. She has pampered herself so long that she has gotten the habit of ill-health —actually has come to the pass where she believes her delusions of invalidism! She elects headaches and nerves and 'attacks' —glories in them! This isn't so unusual—lots of women do it. The marvel is that Calvin believes her. She has barricaded herself so long with the accessories, traditions and vocabulary of nerves that he has actually come to regard her as delicate! She holds him off outside the invisible, insurmountable walled enclosure of her frailty and he accepts her folderol as inability—pampering her accordingly. How a man as keen as Calvin Darrach can be so imposed upon year after year baffles me! Nell inherits grandmother's sturdiness, just as I do, and yet she keeps her husband waiting on her, coddling her, fetching and carrying, as if she were some little god of Shinto in need of perpetual propitiation. I suppose the reason may be that Calvin is so well drilled by this time that he would rather do 'most anything rather than run the risk of one of Nell's nerve tantrums."

" 'O, the rarity of Christian charity,'" quoted Persis.

"That's good, too. I wouldn't talk like this about her if she weren't my cousin. Frankly, I'm piqued that she owns such a darling as Cal, while I'm doomed to roam around looking for mine, like a lost soul. There is one strange thing about men who marry clingy vines: after a while they seem to expect puniness of women and like them for it. Nine times out of ten the husband of such a woman will look askance at the girl who

goes to walk in a snow storm. And if, on better acquaintance, she fails to react to the mass of nervous stimulus that his own experience has taught him women should react to, why—the chances are that he'll set her down as unwomanly and not finely made! It's perfectly astounding what power nervous females have to mould men's notions of womankind.

"Well, to go back to Nellie. Of course, shirking all her normal occupations, she has lots of empty, lonely hours left on her hands. Calvin has to be away a lot on business trips. She's always wailing with loneliness, complaining of neglect, nagging at Calvin to stay home with her. Fancy a man with a big business on his hands staying home to amuse his wife! Once I visited them, when they were first married. I was that disgusted with Nell's whining that I escaped her long enough to go out and telegraph myself that father was deathly sick. On the pretext of pressing home duty I packed up and went."

"What sagacity! Do you always extricate yourself as readily?" Persis laughed.

Encouraged by this approval, Sallie elaborated her theme more fully. "Honestly, she made our days a misery because Cal wouldn't stay home every morning and take us automobiling. I could have laid violent hands on her frequently—just longed to shake her till her French heels clicked together merrily.

"I've never quite understood what Nell does elect as her mission in life—unless it is to have a good time and spend Cal's money. For beside refusing to make a home for him, she won't have children. She says it's such a 'fag' to be tied down to a small child and at the mercy of a nurse. Moreover, she is always insinuating that she isn't 'strong' enough to endure the hardship of motherhood. Enter disparity again. Calvin, of course, adores children—it's pitiful to watch him handle and caress other people's offspring. His attitude always reminds

me of a little homeless, starved waif standing outside a bake-shop window full of Christmas cakes. All my life I've heard a lot about maternal instinct, the instinct of fatherhood coming only with the advent and development of progeny. But such theories don't impress me much when I see Cal's great tender heart closing around somebody's babe. When I watch him lift a little child to a seat on the lofty ledge of his shoulder, I feel quite sure that the wistfulness and longing in his big blue eyes means unsatisfied father-love. Calvin isn't the kind of a man who goes on eternally subordinated to the whims of a small-souled, peevish little woman. Nell twists him around her finger now, because he's too gallant to quibble and haggle over silly little details that don't amount to a peanut one way or the other. But he is very intelligent, and he has a tremendous grip on life—a large notion of what life should yield. Some day he'll wake up to the fact that it isn't yielding him much."

A fat porter waddled through the car, and hailing him Sallie ordered sarsaparilla, protesting that gossip always made her thirsty. While they were waiting for glasses and cracked ice, she continued: "I've kept my hawk eye on lots of marriages, Persis! They all go charmingly for two or three years—while the novelty lasts and the glamour shimmers. It's after this stage passes that the canny woman begins to look about her for a new grapple on her husband's devotion."

Sallie paused long enough for Persis to express her ideas on the subject of waning devotion. But Persis rarely exposed her theories, and true to herself, remained mute, sipping her cool drink while her friend rambled on.

"There's nothing astounding in the spectacle of narrow-minded, peevish little women tyrannising over big brainy men. We meet it often enough to grow accustomed to it! My explanation is that all such weak, limp creatures eternally appeal to the chivalry of strong men. What dumfounds me is how such women *continue* to hold and sway their husbands so

effectually, year after year! How in the world does Nell do it? I can understand how she first caught Cal's fancy—she is refined and well-bred. Such men always demand that of a woman, you know. And, too, she dresses well. But you'd naturally infer that a steady diet of refinement and pretty clothes, three times a day, three hundred and sixty-five days in one year, would produce brain fag, wouldn't you? Or torpid affections, or some symptom of a weak heart? I confess the problem is too knotty for me!"

She turned wearily toward the window and amused herself for some time watching the New England landscape. River meadows, rich tobacco-fields, and serried acres of peach orchards; red sand pits, tawny brickyards, and herds of placid cows grazing over the granite-bound pasture lands and hillocks, the marshy levels and rugged slopes embroidered with mosses, sweet fern, yellow hardhack, and black alders, with here and there a scraggy, gnarled old apple tree, its topmost branches alive with pink and white bloom. From time to time, as the train intersected the summer breezes, redolence of apple-blossoms wafted fitfully in through the open windows of the car. Presently with a sharp lunge to the right the track spanned the Connecticut River just below Warehouse Point, and Sallie turned to her friend with "How lovely it all is! As I've been watching the country I felt how like it you are—so quiet, steadfast and beautiful. You're what they call a daughter of the soil, aren't you? And I'm glad you are my best friend."

Much refreshed by her sarsaparilla, Sallie began to put the finishing touches on the Darrachs.

"Now this is my prediction: please mark what I'm telling you here on the 'Limited' for future reference. Some time or other Calvin Darrach is going to meet the woman intended by destiny to be his mate. And his great rich nature is going to respond to her, in spite of honour, enfeebled Nell, or anything else that stands in the way. And it won't be Cal's fault, or the

woman's fault—it will be the working out of inevitable, elemental forces too strong to be suppressed. And from the quarter of the boarding-house where Nell has entrenched herself there'll be lamentations and gnashing of teeth."

"Heavens! What a mournful picture! Can't you give poor Nellie some hint of the frightful fate threatening her?" asked Persis, with a dry note in her voice. She fancied that she had learned when to discount Sallie's imagination.

"Who was ever yet able to break through the shell of a self-complaisant, self-sufficient little woman like Nell? Indeed, I shall save my breath against the day I have to labour for it. What I'm dreading is the scandal, the smutch on our family pride."

"Perhaps there won't be any scandal: perhaps destiny will take things into its own hands——"

"Destiny nothing," growled Sallie. "Fate didn't join Cal and Nellie, and I don't for one moment expect it will separate them. Oh, well—it's too much for me." And with a big sigh she waived the subject. "Where are we, anyway?" she exclaimed. Then looking at her watch, "My dear child, in half an hour you will have to change cars at Springfield! How I shall miss you! Will the Hanchetts meet you at the train?"

"Mr. Hanchett is trying a case and his wife has indigestion. I shall have to go by stage. But with the thought of meeting you and Jerry next week I shall not be too lonely," she added bravely.

"Jim will meet me in Boston and take me across the city," said Sallie.

The smokestacks of Springfield factories appeared just ahead. The engine whistled warningly, the fat porter hawked his platitude about not leaving articles in the car, and several business men yawned, stretched, and began to beat dust off their coat collars with their handkerchieves. Persis collected her magazines and luggage. "Sallie dear, I've had a lovely

visit! Write to me as soon as you can dispose of Jim Kimberley!" The porter hurried her across the tracks, and from the platform of the "Limited" Sallie waved good-by until the north-bound "local" bore around the curve out of sight.

CHAPTER III

PERSIS LITCHFIELD had a decidedly judicious turn of mind that might have been explained by a look into her ancestry. Her maternal grandfather had been a chief justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts; her father's father was a vice-chancellor; and her own father was a lawyer. At the age of forty-two, when Persis was eight years old, Mr. Litchfield had died. That his child, born two years after the death of an infant son, had not been a male, had been the supreme disappointment of his life. His ambition was to carry on the legal traditions of his own and his wife's family, to entail law in the Litchfield blood. But destiny had other purposes in view, and instead of a second son Persis had been born. However, the law of heredity had stood steadfast in mental traits, although the issue of sex had failed. And Persis had received as part of her intellectual birthright the gift (or burden) of a judicial mind. While in all matters that affected her sense of right and wrong she could be very resolute and discriminating, the feminine qualities of her mentality quite overbalanced any tendency to unpleasant strong-mindedness. Indeed, her judiciousness served her well as ballast; for from a remote ancestor on her mother's side she had inherited a masterful vein of impulse. The weak spot in the otherwise well-balanced mechanism known as Persis Litchfield was more a subtile one, and lay in the region of the soul. Fundamental faith was deplorably lacking in her. She was like some finely wrought, beautifully complex, and highly serviceable instrument that stood inert and useless for lack of some suitable lubricant. Her hope was unbounded, her charity generous; she was charmingly imaginative, and free from all taint of suspicion. But

whenever an issue rose above the plane of the well-known, her exacting judicious mind instantly stood on guard, demanding evidence and literalness.

It was this conflict of opposing characteristics, this struggle for inner harmony, that influenced people who did not know her well to call her "cold" and "indifferent." Those who did understand her never made such mistakes. A gallant old gentleman, a friend of her father, who had watched her develop from infancy, had once said that "at eighteen Persis Litchfield reminded him of a pure, beautiful glacier beneath which lay the sun-kissed slopes of Italy." At first thought this was a too poetical likeness to apply to a quiet, gray-eyed New England girl; but those who knew her intimately never forgot the old gentleman's description of her.

Her father, after years of tormenting doubt, had finally filled his cup of consolation at the well of philosophy. Mrs. Litchfield had passed her days totally without the consolation of religion. A "good" woman she certainly had been. The sense of justice was born in her, too, keen and appraisable. She made it a point to give generously of self and means to supply human needs—as she saw them; but all the more elusive, finer graces of feminine Christian charity were obscured by her *credo* of *noblesse oblige*. She gave generously because she had received generously, and because it became the great to regard the small. After the death of her infant son, Mrs. Litchfield, like her husband, had wanted another. But while Mr. Litchfield had been chivalrous enough to forget his own preferences in a growing love for his beautiful little daughter, Mrs. Litchfield had resented the Creator's interference in the sex of her offspring and had never forgiven the child for not being a boy. Persis, with all a child's psychic alertness, had early felt this estrangement in her mother, and although she accepted it along with other of life's anomalies, in her heart she always resented her mother's dislike of her.

Somewhere from a remote and obscure source of her being Persis had drawn the quality of piety. A willingness to tolerate devoutness, a certain sense of reverence, an ill-defined need of religion, the child early gave assurance of. In the rapid putting-forth of adolescence this reverential faculty had developed into religious possibilities. Stimulated by a woman of mature religious zeal, and without the knowledge or approval of her mother, at the age of thirteen Persis had been baptised into the faith of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Two months later the saintly old bishop proclaimed her a child of the true faith. But faith, unhappily, was the stumbling block that stood in Persis's road. Her soil had not been wisely nor sufficiently prepared for the delicate seed of faith. Her spiritual growth had been forced, instead of allowed to grow out of experience and conviction, as some delicate and beautiful plant is thrust into unnatural bloom by hot-house processes. Her real growth of spirit was hindered and delayed pitiably, till the great passionate moulding forces of life struck her, and with their master hands lifted her out of the realm of intense, individual existence into larger sympathies and service for human conditions.

So under the strain of growing conceptions of life and the impetus of larger action, Persis struggled on alone in her religious experiences, until she reached her sophomore year at Wellesley College. Here the surroundings registered another epoch in her soul growth. Where once she had experienced difficulty in accepting one creed, she now found herself beset and disturbed by the doctrines and mystifications of a dozen. An ardent noisy rill of Methodism lost itself in the brook of Baptist immersion. A strong, subtile undertow of Unitarianism swept out under the swell of a Presbyterian surf. A wavelet from the distant sea of Buddhism, represented by a classmate from Japan, moved on serenely past the certain current of Catholicism. The girl who sat beside her in chapel

was a Jewess agnostic. Carried along on these differing waves of orthodoxy, influenced and fascinated by parts of all of them, drifting farther out of the harbour of her chosen religion, Persis at last decided to free herself from the bonds of any dogma; like her father, she created a creed for herself—one that simplified and consoled, and embodied kindness with justice, sincerity with mercy. And so she rested awhile from the turmoil of doubt, until the next crisis in her life projected her from her niche, precipitating her dizzy and bruised on the hard floor of readjustment again.

In the middle of her junior year at college a telegram announcing her mother's death had come. Meanwhile there was Jerry—and all that life with him promised. The son of her father's friend and neighbour, Jerry, three years her senior, had been her staunch admirer since babyhood. They had literally been reared together, sharing their toys, sports, and confidences. Jerry had alternated bites of his gingerbread lady with her, lugged her on his sled through snow drifts, allowed her to help him set rabbit traps in the hemlock grove, and stolen her best hair ribbon. In fact, he had been her unfailing champion and ideal of all manhood. They were a rare example of psychic understanding, which, growing out of childhood, heralds affinity and love. So she turned to love for consolation, and bereft now of all family ties, established herself therein to the exclusion of every other interest.

While she was visiting Sallie Howe the first two months after their Commencement, her own home having been broken up and sold, Mr. and Mrs. Hanchett had invited her to spend the year intervening between her graduation and her marriage at their home in Tinkham, Massachusetts. Mrs. Hanchett was a colourless little woman whose husband had been the law-partner of Persis's father and the girl's legal guardian since the death of Mr. Litchfield. This makeshift home with an elderly couple Persis had been very glad to accept. Considering the

length of time the lovers had known each other, the orphanage and homelessness of Persis, and the goodly income they both inherited, it had seemed best for them to marry early in life and grow up together. So while Persis planned to rest a year from the taxation of college work and collect the accessories of housekeeping, Jerry had entered the law office of his uncle in Springfield, with the certain prospect of promotion to junior partnership in the near future. They planned to be married a year from the June of their graduations.

In the midst of his visit to Persis during the Christmas week of this intermediate year, Jerry had unexpectedly and most unequivocally made the announcement that sent his sweetheart plunging down from the niche where the habits and inclinations of her lifetime had placed her.

They had just finished their exchange of Christmas gifts before the sitting-room fire-place, after the Hanchetts had early and discreetly retired, when Jerry declared that nature had never intended him for the law. Moreover, he said, his past six months of trial at it had convinced him beyond any possibility of doubt or mistake, that he could never make a success of it. It was all too sordid, too mundane, too corrupt. Aside from this, his gift of argument that had been so preëminent and effectual in his debating days at Harvard, had threatened to fail him. He must work in some field where persuasion, rather than argument, won the day: some occupation more humanitarian, more potent in its abiding effect on the welfare and happiness of mankind.

"But Jerry—the ethics of law!" Persis had reminded him. "All your splendid ideals of right for the wronged, fairness for the down-trodden, justice for the poor! What could be more humanitarian than all this?"

"Ah, but if a man feels his capacity to compass all this flowing from him—what then?"

"Fresh courage—a new undaunted stand! And think of all

the advantages—the weight of Mr. Hanchett's and your uncle's influence—so much prestige for a young man! Only last week a Springfield judge told Mr. Hanchett that with all your family precedent and your own native ability, it would be hard to limit you when you're forty. Surely, Jerry, you will not overlook such advantages and encouragement, when you face the turning point in your career."

But her arguments and pleadings fell flat and futile before the adamantine wall of Jerry's determination. He had decided to throw over his start in the practice of law: that settled it. Stunned and hopeless, convinced at last of her powerlessness to influence him, she asked him what alternative he proposed to take up as his life work.

"Theology, my dear," he replied unhesitatingly.

If he had struck her rudely across the face, the sensation would have nearly equalled the disappointment her hope experienced at his reply. Jerry a minister—she a minister's wife! All her past doubts, all the ancestral prejudice to dogma, flashed over her in ready resentment of such a shift in destiny. For the fraction of a second there passed through her mind the alternative of breaking her engagement. But the next pulse-beat her heart banished the disproportionate thought, and her great and life-long love of him triumphed over the distastefulness of the cup he had mixed and offered her. Better renounce her inclinations a thousand times over than lose Jerry once, she assured herself!

After the several moments she required to regain sight of herself in the novel situation of wife of a minister, she asked, "What denomination, Jerry?"

With a promptness that showed her how settled his plans were, he replied, "The Protestant Episcopal, darling."

Then as she still sat grave and unbending, her feet pressed against the fender and her eyes focussed on the flame that blazed fitfully behind the back-log, he went to her and put his face

down next to her cheek. "Dear heart! Jerry knows the struggle. But might it not be possible for you to renew your faith and help lead me out to my largest capacity for high service?"

The old charm of his nearness, the gentleness of his plea for forbearance and help, made the love in her surge up to meet him on his strange new ground. After all, would it not be a high privilege indeed to join hands with Jerry and so give their youth, their best faculties, a new consecration to His Holy Work?

As she still made no reply Jerry left her impetuously, returning to his chair in front of the fireplace. With his going came the old consciousness of nothing but the struggle and necessity of pulling herself up to this new demand upon her, to harmonise past conviction with future exigence. Her lover continued, "How long I've wrestled with the question, Persis! But I've conquered—convinced at last that the fullest, happiest future for us both lies in such a sacrifice—convinced that only so can I best fulfill my own destiny and put you where your splendid attributes can come to perfect maturity. I have a horror of slumping after a few years of married life, Persis—so many couples do it! The surest way to shun mediocrity is to sail so high you soar above it. And I feel so sure of myself, darling—so sure of you!"

He jumped up and went again to stand beside her, this time touching his lips to the forehead that yielded so reluctantly to his appeal. "There is just one thing about our new plans that makes me sad, darling. They mean that I shall have to ask you to wait for me three years. We would have to postpone our marriage until I graduated from the theological seminary. I could not divide my time between love and study for another long stretch—my love would take the bigger half." He reached across the little space that partitioned them so effectually, and found her hand. "Believe me, darling, when I tell you that the

thought of separation gives me keenest anxiety—endless heartache. Knowing that you are not placed here in just the atmosphere your temperament needs—bless the Hanchetts' kind hearts!—I should worry about you, fret about you, and feel that I wasn't doing right by you. And as for myself—it's like slow torture to forego the little home next June! I need you, dear heart—long for you—God knows how much!"

He knelt beside her, his head in her lap, his lowly attitude accentuating the sincerity of his renunciation. She laid her hand lightly across the back of his head, and where her fingertips met his temple she felt the heart-throbs beating furiously against them. She held them so a moment to still his senses, and presently he arose quickly. Leaning his right arm along the mantelpiece, his left hand thrust in his pocket, he hurried on. "It's the whole of life I see, Persis—our union ten, twenty—yes, forty years from now. For the sake of our usefulness and development ultimately, I am willing to renounce happiness now. We're both so young, dear! We can afford to wait awhile. It would be such a sublime test of our love!"

He stooped and took her pale, grave face in both his hands. "Is your love for me great enough to wait three years?" he whispered.

It was the same old plea, primeval as the hills. What man yet ever asked the woman who loves him to prove her love by sacrifice, and found her wanting?

She looked up into his face with her slow, caressing gaze. Longing, homelessness and love flowed into her eyes successively, as one wavelet follows another over an inland lake. And it was love that answered.

"I know now that I should wait a lifetime for you, Jerry." Her voice thrilled him with its sweet sincerity; he took her in his arms and held her, close to his gratitude and love.

"Dear, brave heart of mine," he whispered, "Jerry's

girl who loves him better than herself! Service, darling, always service! There lies the true key to all abiding happiness."

So on the buoyancy of his faith she rested. And gradually she came to feel sure of his judgment. Another moment she rested against his heart, and while there felt a great contentment in surrendering her will to his, in letting his strength reinforce her own. But the fragment of peace was transient, reacting in a fresh consciousness of her loneliness, her homelessness, and her multiple need of him. She was still able to control her word of protest, but her feelings she could not control; tears splashed over her pale cheeks, proclaiming her disappointment. Putting aside the hand that tried to hide the teardrops, Jerry held his own cool handkerchief against her eyes with gentle pressure. When her sobs ceased he kissed her eyelids, and glancing around the room for some means of diverting her, discovered their skates, which hung on either side of the fireplace ready for use the next morning. Since childhood it had been part of their Christmas morning celebration to go skating on the Connecticut River.

"Come, dear one," he whispered. "It's only Christmas Eve, but we'll go for our skate now! Won't it be fun? Here, where's your warm coat and your furs?"

He began to ransack a small closet off the sitting-room, and stopped before he had found her wraps, to run to the window, peering out across the hillscape.

"Was there ever such a dazzle of snow on the meadows? The moonlight fairly scintillates on the old river! It's all for us, Persis—to enjoy together! Let me hold your muff till we get outdoors! Has this coat a flannel interlining? No—let me button it for you! Now—we're off! It's ridiculous to believe we have ever grown up and plan to break each other's hearts by a three years' wait! We're youngsters again, and we're going off to skate, and forget it. Wait! I'll shut the door—so, softly.

There, now! The Hanchetts won't even mistrust what we're up to!"

Thus Persis rounded the turning-point that occasioned the sadness from which Sallie Howe tried so artfully to woo her the morning toward the last of her visit in New Jersey, when they both discussed marriage from the standpoint of spectators.

CHAPTER IV

TWO days before the friends agreed to meet at Wellesley College, Persis received a bulky special delivery from Sallie Howe. Such missives were an event in Tinkham, both to the recipient and the inhabitants. The postmaster took upon himself the responsibility of their safe disposal, delivering this one into Persis's hands with the air of a man who performs his business duties punctiliously well.

A foreboding of some calamity made Persis postpone opening her letter. While she fingered it she looked about for a suitable spot in which to vanquish unhappy premonitions, and decided on the old garden bench underneath the cherry tree in the orchard. Breaking the seal, she read:

"DEAREST PERSIS:

"Arrived in Boston on time, to be met by Jim in all the glory of a new gray suit. (He affects gray because it matches his eyes.) Then we went whizzing out to the Kimberley suburbs, and had a good time elaborating our plans for the coaching party. In the evening Jim played the piano for me, and as always when I hear beautiful music, I wished for you. I wished, too, that the scene would go on forever. Probably, though, I should get terribly hungry and pine for a game of tennis and the theatre. Finally it occurred to me that midnight ought to see all decent children in bed. When I got up to my room, Mrs. Kimberley's French maid was waiting for me and insisted on giving me my bath! After the simple Nora this was a trifle overwhelming, but I tried to act as if I was accustomed to such performances all my life, and finally drove the poor tired thing off to bed. The next morning Jim took me for a long drive. All was going our way, dear, when without any warning, and apparently without half trying, Jim's aged grandmother died that very afternoon. The maid found her just at dusk sitting bolt upright in a rocking chair—she had not been alone more than ten minutes. (I admire her for picking out a rocker—shall have her in mind when my turn comes.) Of course the whole family is plunged into

mourning and our beautiful plans are all at sea. Wasn't it disagreeable of the old lady to die and spoil it all for us? I bawled well. With this horrid gloom all around I begin to feel depressed myself; have accepted Anne Buel's invitation to spend the next three days at her house as an escape from the Kimberley crêpe. This little visit with Anne and my week at Wellesley will finish my New England tour, I fear. Oh, well, there is always Father and the Jersey coast. You see I plan to go ahead, nothing daunted, and meet you and Jerry on the nineteenth. It's a bitter disappointment to leave Jim behind, but I know you and Jerry will be nice to me. Jim says but for the looks of it he would go, too, but he could hardly appear at the college in gala trim while the rest of the family are shrouded in black—the Kimberleys are so well known!

"How are you, child? Not too lonely, I hope. Remember that in two days you'll have Jerry—and I myself am not so bad. You must please meet me on the 2.08 train. What luck that we can have our old freshman room in the village! There goes another black image creeping along past my door! Even the servants are in mourning! Never mind—they enjoy it and it's good for trade. Be sure to bring your white organdy with the violet shoulder bands—I love you in it. Longing to see you and loving you

"As always, SALLIE."

Persis sat watching a robin ogle an earthworm, wondering if by any chance cut and dried plans ever did materialise? Poor Sallie, who had staked her entire summer's pleasure on the certainty of Jim Kimberley being at Commencement! As she went back to the kitchen to press her organdy the retreating image of lost good times played hide and seek with the plans she substituted in their places. That she cared a great deal more to meet Jim Kimberley than she wished to acknowledge must have been true, for when she stopped to pick a bunch of snow-balls for Mrs. Hanchett, she muttered to herself that somebody always put mud in her wine.

Two mornings later Jerry hurried her along through the crowded corridors of College Hall, out on to the south porch, where across sun-drenched lake, the terraced slopes of the Italian Gardens set their finish to the incomparable grounds. "Hurry,"

he urged, "No, don't wait to fix your hair-pins! The Gardens are like fairyland! See that lady birch! And just watch the yellow sheen on the weeping willows grow lush and blend into the copper beeches, and then tone down into the rich lustre of the evergreens! It's worth the trip to see just that again—say nothing of my girl."

They stood enchanted by the miracle of the June morning, oblivious of the gay throngs and motion all about them. Already Commencement fêtes were crowding each other in rapid succession, and this was Float Day, set aside for the carnival on Lake Waban. Animated groups of visitors, young brothers and sisters, parents and Harvard students, were beginning to assemble on the spacious verdure of campus, or to stroll along the hill slopes that give Wellesley its picturesque site. Carpenters, gardeners, engineers, all the mechanic staff of the college had been drafted into service to provide seating capacity for the several hundred guests that a few hours later would throng the lake front. Two boys strung Chinese lanterns in festive profusion among the superb old oaks. Four lively sophomores were swathing blue and white bunting around the boat-house rotunda, through which energetic crew girls, with big class numerals emblazoned on the fronts of their white sweaters, flitted out across the campus, flourishing the shiny new oars that marked them for distinction later in the day. From underneath the boat-house on the left-hand shore and jutting out two hundred feet into the lake, its spiles freshly painted for the occasion and looking like the legs of some enormous fresh-water centipede, the sterns of several St. Lawrence River boats nosed about in the sedges and blue pickerel weed. A professional "coach" from New Haven was ordering the class shells launched at the farther end of the boat-house for his skilled inspection; their graceful tawny cedar lengths ducked lithely into the water, as live things long confined take to their element. Out on the lake in a little boat of robin's-egg blue, the Junior coxswain

rowed the college coach, her smart white sweater setting off her raven hair and black gymnasium suit to picturesque advantage. Occasionally when her boat swung in shoreward, her resonant voice echoed against the bluffside of Pellmell Hill in sharp reprimand or instruction to the carpenters driving a pole into the lake about forty feet from shore. Around this pole after the demonstration of skill in rowing, and in the first splash of sunset, the five class shells, each crew gay with class colours, were to moor in the form of a long-pointed star, and wake the sombre silence of the West Woods with echo of college cheer and class song, till twilight threw its mantle over the lake.

"Let's run away from it all, dear!" As always the persuasive note in Jerry's voice won her away from seriousness. "If I don't spirit you off, some garrulous, declamatory '98 girl will swoop down upon us with a torrent of reminiscence, and I sha'n't have you to myself again for a whole hour."

She smiled adoringly at him, well pleased with his jealous ardour. "Are there any of those monumental faculty mooning about?" he asked, twisting his neck upward and backward almost to dislocation, while his keen eyes ranged over the brick façade of College Hall, with its bulging fronts of faculty apartments.

"We've outgrown the need of precaution," she laughed, "but it's good to know that time hasn't dulled your sense of location."

"My dear Miss Litchfield," he assured her with mock ceremony, "I did not escort you along these illustrious, begravelled paths of learning in the forbidden glamour of summer nights, neither did I row you surreptitiously along the lakeside in the inconspicuous and kindly shadows of the West Woods four of the choicest years of my youth, without feeling passably sure of professorial watch-towers. The discretion those years obtained for me still clings—albeit we have outgrown the necessity. I behold the five-storied expanses of green shades

gratefully! Faculty sleeps—or has gone on a spree in Boston. Let's go for a tramp around the lake."

She did not protest, neither did she advance. "Remember that day when we were homesick little freshmen and I came out to call? We couldn't see the lake through the rain-sheets and the terraces lay behind a bank of mist! That was our first trip around the lake, darling—I can see you in the rain yet!" He closed his eyes in reminiscence, his handsome ruddy face upturned to the sunlight. "I loved you then, dearest—and I love you now. Come—before duty and change grip us again. To-day you are all mine—Jerry's sweetheart and his bride-to-be." He linked his arm through hers jealously, and drew her toward the footpath that led around the lake.

Lovingly yielding, she let him take her down the bluffside with the light, springing footsteps of one descending a hill. On level footing once more they sauntered on in single file till she turned back to him impulsively with, "What time is it? We must not forget Sallie in our own happiness."

A transient frown passed over his mobile face. "What train is she due on?" he asked, looking at his watch.

"The 2:08."

"One—one and a half. That's around the lake. Half an hour for a rest and twenty minutes to reach the village. Another half hour for all the luncheon we'll be apt to get with all this mob to be foddered," he calculated. "By Zeus! We've just time to make it. I'll beat you to the edge of that little bridge yonder!"

They crossed the inlet of the lake, skirted the mammoth icehouse, and edged their way through the tangle of bullbrier that thrust its prehensile arms defiantly across the path. In twenty minutes they struck a narrow trail that led through luxuriance of grapes and ferns into the West Woods. Here the last far sounds of hammering and Float Day bustle came to them faintly, and occasionally they caught the vibrant note in

the coach's orders, as her voice rang out across the water. They paused under a young oak to listen to what seemed deep and strange and beautified by their love, till the whir of wings beat past so close that they started out of their silence. A bobolink hovered, teetered on the topmost catkin of an alder bush, and poured out his song for them blithely.

Jerry's breath came fast. "Listen," he whispered. "He's trying to tell you how I feel. 'Jerry's girl—Jerry's girl.' Come closer, darling—while the music lasts."

The song burst ended. He passed his arm around her and they sauntered on. Any one heartless enough to have intruded on their solitude would have been struck with the idea that they were intended thus to walk through life together, so young and fine and fair they were—so fashioned for each other. And once more the silence of those who understand well and have loved long settled over them, till presently down the path a little way, in the lowest branches of an ample beech tree, Jerry espied a rustic perch that hung out over the lake and beckoned to lovers alluringly.

"Look ahead!" he exclaimed. "Oh, the man who laid out these college grounds had a provident eye for the future of the girls he fostered! Careful for the lace on your petticoat," he warned, as she scrambled up into the perch lightly. "I don't propose to have you disappearing for a whole half hour by and by because I was careless enough to let you tear your lacery on these snags."

"There now," he went on, flapping imaginary dust off the perch-rail with his handkerchief, "do you like to go to walk with me? Isn't this nicer than rushing into the embraces of a hundred loquacious girls, all talking at once?"

She laughed. "Jerry, you're growing positively arrogant about your ability to entertain me. If I weren't so happy I should deem it my duty to snub you, just a little."

"Don't—I couldn't endure it to-day. It's a poor specimen

of man that can't entertain his own girl!" Then his whole manner concentrated and his face darkened. "Please be very serious now, Persis, I have something most important to say."

The extreme change in his demeanour from light gayety to this solemnity startled her. And bracing herself to meet whatever his transition foreboded, she waited for him to go on. A helpless feeling came over her, and to steady herself she turned and faced the lake, which sparkled and twinkled in the rain of midday sun. With a backward swing of memory as swift as her fear was unaccountable, she remembered that in their childhood they had always called this sparkle of sunlight on water fairy money. She recalled a day when as nine- and twelve-year-olds they had stolen away, and, disobedient children, taking a boat, had rowed out into the middle of the pond about two miles behind their home, to gather some of this fabulous wealth. The voyage had been highly satisfactory from the standpoint of fun, if not from finance, and Jerry was giving her a safe mooring when, in her excitement of forbidden pleasure, she had stepped on the edge of the boat, lost her balance, and landed knee-deep amongst the snail-shells and sedges along the shore. After he had pulled her out of the ooze, Jerry had been much vexed with her clumsiness. And she had wept bitter tears when he made her look at her shoes—her splendid new shoes with all the shine gone! But as always, he had risen to the occasion: he made her take off her shoes and stockings and sit all the rest of the morning perched on a big rock, while her nether apparel dried in the sun. Meanwhile he himself had gone off up the inlet to hunt for lizards and mud-turtles. Down all the years since something of his masterfulness then survived, unchanged. Would he mould her to his intent and purposes as readily now, she asked herself?

Tense and on the defensive, she faced him again, ready for his revelation. It came, with all of Jerry's positiveness.

"Persis, I've been forced to change my creed. I'm going to be a Presbyterian minister."

He shifted his gaze, fastening it upon her face, while she sat speechless with all the gravity of silence she always managed to barricade herself with at times of crises or high feeling. The tumult of her displeasure beat against her brain in rhythm with the tattoo of a woodpecker drumming on an oak just inside the lake path. The scene with him only six months ago on Christmas Eve, flashed before her and gropingly she tried to trace the causes that had led up to his change from law to the Church, to Presbyterianism. Still mystified by his conduct she involuntarily reviewed her own; her earnest strivings to cast off her old prejudice to the Protestant Episcopal doctrines, to readjust herself to Jerry's choice, and renew her faith for his sake. And just as she was beginning to rejoice in that she had been able to accomplish all this, here came Jerry veering around like a weather vane, proclaiming his predilection for another faith! She wondered if he expected her to throw over the rich symbolism and pageantry of the Church for a ritualism of plainness and simplicity, as, forsooth, she might change the feather on her hat?

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The merciful words came back to her now, as turmoil again threatened her tranquillity.

She projected herself into the future with all the power of her fervid, brooding imagination. She saw Jerry being sent out to some little church in a barren frontier town, thousands of miles away from all she loved and held dear; she saw herself years hence struggling to fill a position so alien to every training and inclination in her that her whole life became a huge farce. Sanctimony and forced beatitudes hardly invited her as a career. Usually her sense of humour spared her from the torment of too zealous imaginings: so now, despite her great tumult of feeling, she gave a low, quick laugh.

Jerry mistook her nervousness for irreverence. Jumping to his feet with sudden vehemence he said, "Very well! Until you choose to take me seriously, I shall hardly feel like taking you into confidences about such very sacred matters. If you'll pardon me, I will assist you down from this cursed little cage, and we'll return to the college."

She felt as if his wrath was scorching her, that somehow she must conciliate, pacify him. She held out both hands to him and said very sweetly, "Oh, Jerry, please be patient with me. Remember my hateful logic and changelessness! It's so hard for me to keep up with your religious pace! I can't change my mind all in a minute. I was not laughing at you, dear, I was laughing at myself—a Presbyterian minister's wife."

The gentleness in her voice, the regret in her eyes, combined with her habitual poise, saved the perilous moment. He sat down again in the perch, opposite her this time, one ankle at right angles with the other knee, his arms folded tightly across his chest. "And you find that so very ludicrous?" he inquired.

Ignoring his offishness and sarcasm, she went on very calmly. "It's all so strange, Jerry—so unlike us both." He still sat too upright for compromise, his face sullen and set. "Now tell me nicely about your new plans," she said, this time with all seriousness. "What made you go over to Presbyterianism? How long have you been thinking of it? And did any one influence you?"

"Heavens, no! Everybody must fight it out for himself. It's my own sincere conviction. It worked itself up out of my deep-seated consciousness, and it's the product of all my thought. For six months I've been grubbing at the very roots of Episcopalianism—reviewing the part it played in past history, weighing what we may expect of it in the future, studying its scope, methods, and purposes. And I confess to you, Persis, that the Church has not come up to my expectations and needs. Too much symbolism—too much 'vain repetition'! Too much of

the taint of monasticism! Do you realise that ecclesiastical circles are making a lot of talk about founding a celibate brotherhood? One of the Church's most influential bishops gave an address at a diocesan convention lately, in which he urgently advocated this branch of church work. I say that this is going back to monasticism. It's trying to fit mediæval methods on to twentieth century conditions. It retards the Church from keeping step with the highest forms of modern thought and requirements."

She held her breath while he denounced Church policy. After all, had it not been this very mediævalism and "vain repetition" that had sapped her own faith?

Jerry broke off a piece of dried branch from the beech tree and snapped it into twigs, impatiently. "May I smoke?" he asked.

She had it on her tongue's end to tell him that it ill became a minister to thus indulge the flesh; that cigars were the solace of nice old judges with ripened careers. But long since she had learned when not to jest with Jerry, and the unwisdom of meeting temper with sarcasm. So she looked at her lover steadily, with just the suspicion of a twinkle in her gray eyes. And Jerry, who understood so much about her, understood now.

"It was kind of you not to say it—I thank you! I smoke now because when I enter the Theological Seminary in the Fall I shall have to put cigars and Christmas presents of ash-trays behind me."

He produced a dusky solace from the pocket of his blue serge coat, lighted it eagerly, and after several assuaging puffs, went on. "I tell you, Persis, these last few months on the East Side have opened my eyes. I've seen the crying need of work, hand to hand, heart to heart work, amongst the slums of our cities. Think what it would mean if all the money and time wasted on church music, incense, and vested choirs were turned

into dispensaries, hospitals, and industrial schools! That's what the Presbyterians are doing. The reason they have so much money to spend on the mission fields is because they forego operatic sopranos and 'soulful' tenors, for the good old hymns and congregational song praise. Their organisation on the foreign field is simply stupendous, Persis,—India, China, Japan and Africa networked with mission stations, schools, hospitals and churches—all alive and all doing vital work. I'm tired of the pomp of intonation, too. Give me God's Word, spoken right out of the heart and as the Bible has it, with no frills and flutings. I don't believe in this continual use of the Sacrament, either—it cheapens a holy service. I think we grow spiritually by putting our moral strength to the test of action, instead of replying so perpetually on the daily feast of the Eucharist. Such rites were all very suitable as the spiritual pastime of mediæval ladies and convent girls. But I think they're *passé* and inadequate for the religious needs of the modern business man. Feeling, then, as I do, what was left for me except to go over to some denomination whose methods and plainness of ritual did appeal to me? The Presbyterians have it."

Flushed with excitement, he paused to regain his "light," puffing away at his cigar furiously. As the possibilities and the ethics of his problem swelled out in proportion to his intensity, he jumped up and began to pace back and forth across the perch, which was so cramped for floor room that she somehow gained an unpleasant impression of something powerful and unhampered brought into close restraint. It was still impossible for her to comprehend how he had leaped so wide a ditch with one bound; above all else she desired to understand the facile mental processes whereby he had wiped his spiritual slate clean of one creed and ciphered out the problems of another with such velocity. It would have taken her years to have arrived at his conclusions.

She waited, expecting him to offer some such enlightenment. But he had fastened his attention on the gala scenes across the lake, and at last she asked, "What happened next, Jerry?"

"Next?" he repeated, with perplexed forehead. "Where was I—let me see! Oh—yes! Nothing happened next. In September I'm going to enter the Seminary in New York and plug into theology for the next three years. In fact, I've passed off a lot of my preliminary exams. already. One of the Harvard professors knows some of the Seminary men, and spoke up for me. Shall we go on?"

Glad of any opportunity to work off her perturbed feelings, she allowed him to help her down from the perch. She hesitated for a moment—the glamour had so vanished from their walk. Jerry by a gesture indicated the path ahead, and ten minutes later they found themselves passing the semicircular terraces of the Italian Gardens, with College Hall facing them across the water. A wide flight of marble steps rose majestically out of the balustrade bordering the lake front, paused to rest by ivy-clad niches, weather-beaten statuary and grottos; then mounted again past square-topped terraces of evergreens, pleached alley-ways, and clipped shrubs, finally giving spacious entrance to box-edged lawn. Surely no fairer setting ever encompassed lovers. But somehow, to Persis, the sunshine on the lake seemed dull and flat. The robins sang beyond her earshot, and gladness had made mysterious disappearance from the morning. The hour hung limp on their hands, as some beautiful fabric loses its airiness when exposed to damp.

Twice she tried to woo back the lost charm, but vainly. Preoccupied with his own musings, Jerry swung along past the classic beauty of the gardens, his tall shoulders slightly stooped, his eyes intent on the gravel path, his face dark and sombre as the evergreens above him.

In the swift pace she had to take of necessity to keep step with him, her tie-lacers became unknotted and she sat down in

the recess of a marble seat to fasten them. A young cypress threw its low, graceful branches over the back of the seat, a mournful, drooping drapery and shelter from the sun, which shone through the immature leaves with a strangely greenish light. It gave an almost unearthly tint to the whiteness of her face and her gown. Her little act of independence, the contour of her shoulders as she stooped, and the striking light from the cypress, brought Jerry to himself.

"Pardon, darling," he muttered humbly. "Let me tie it." He knelt on one knee in the gravel at her feet, and busied his mannish fingers with the knot. A tremour passed through her. "Too tight?" He glanced up at her interrogatively, and started as his eyes met her own.

"Your loveliness in that light frightens me! Yet I should like to keep you so always Shall we sit here and rest?"

Still tremulous she glanced around at the enfolding cypress. "No, I think not. It's too suggestive. We'll go on."

"Will you keep to the lakeside, or shall we climb the terraces? Somehow I should like to see your white gown against the greenery—it would suggest to me in this setting ancient and romantic things." He held her closely in his regard, all chivalry, all devotion again.

"Thank you—I'll walk in the sunshine."

As they passed along by the balustrade, she tapped the marble coping lightly with her hot fingers, and despite her effort to rivet her attention on the outcome of their future, it was little scenes from their happy childhood that flitted across her consciousness with tantalising persistency. Even the grotesque evergreens clipped into fantastic shapes along the terrace slopes reminded her for all the world of Noah's ark trees in the days when they used to drive their impossible animals across the nursery floor. Had it all come to this, she asked herself searchingly, that they should spend their gala day disagreeing, quarrelling, forsooth, over religion?

Then she remembered that it was almost time for Sallie—Sallie with her agreeability and her unwillingness to take life too hard! "Oh, Jerry, do look at your watch! We're forgetting the 2:08 train."

"By Zeus, that's so! And I'm hungry, too. Let's cut the rest of our walk. If we strike in by Tupelo Point, we can catch the bus."

They had a hurried luncheon in the village, and afterward Jerry excused himself from going to the train, saying he would come to take the girls up to the college at quarter-past three.

A few minutes later Sallie tripped off the car platform, precipitating herself into the arms of her friend. "You dear thing to meet me! Where's Jerry? And guess who I ran on to in the Union Station! Clarissa Dunbar! Remember how she used to beat me at tennis freshman year? Well, I could wind her in one set now—she's that podgy and overfed."

The commotion and expectancy of the day had overflowed from the college grounds and poured along the little village street, a stream of bareheaded, cordial college girls bearing off their guests from the incoming trains. Arrived at their old freshman room, Sallie began to discard her tan linen travelling costume and incase herself in immaculate lengths of white, cut after the fashion of a yachting suit, posing before the glass to adjust a sailor knot of blue silk on the front of her blouse. "This villainous mirror! How I ache to pitch my shoe through it—for the sake of all freshmen coming after me! It gives me three hips on the right side, a nose and a half, four eyes and no mouth." And she shook the corrugated horror impatiently, trying to find her proportions.

"I'll be your mirror, Sallie. Turn around—no, slowly—so I can see if your skirt hangs true."

Perversely, Sallie revolved three times on her white duck toes, proudly conscious that no skirt of hers ever hung in any way but the most correct.

"You're every inch a New York girl—and what's more, you look it," Persis pronounced.

"Thank you—but look at my face! I could bawl, I'm so—"

"Please don't—if you do, I shall!"

Regardless of crisp, fresh gown Sallie took Persis in her arms. "Tell your mother all about it," she said tenderly.

"Jerry makes me sad. He's changed again! He's left the Church and says he's going to be a Presbyterian minister!"

"By the great horned dace of the mystic Ganges!" exclaimed Sallie. She sank into the solitary rocking chair, with her heels braced in a mesh of the worn straw matting, her knees straight. Raising her arms aloft, she placed the forefinger of one hand on the forefinger of the other, and began:

"Act 1.—Jerry a lawyer: said Jerry eminently fitted for legal purposes: several advantageous influences pushing him along: every prospect brilliant.

"Act 2.—Jerry bored with the law: eminently unfitted for it (according to his own delusions): devout and lofty aspirations toward theology: lifelong consecration to the Church.

"Act 3. Shift 1.—Jerry a backslider to the Episcopal faith: painful chaos and search: fresh enlightenment plus strong convictions, and isk!—— Jerry a Presbyterian minister.

"Shift Next.—Unforseeable and dreaded!" And she flicked off the situation flippantly.

"Don't jest, Sallie—it's too serious."

"Serious! I should call it positively sober. If he keeps on changing at his present velocity where are you going to land? And Jerry used to be a regular Gibraltar!"

"Oh, we shall land on our feet—we must! I'm sure I'm making too hard work of it. And down in my heart I'm not so heathenish that I object to Jerry being a minister, Sallie. I love him well enough to adapt myself to whatever he does. But this tendency to shift about so—that is what worries me." And she looked the picture of woe.

"Never mind, dear, Jerry is quite young yet. After all, I fancy most fellows have a hard time finding out what they are good for. When he does strike his level, he will surely win out. I'd bank on him. He's clever and alert, with a brilliant, supple mind, and do you take my advice and stop worrying about him."

"There is one hitch that does worry me," Persis confessed, "and that's foreign missions. It's daylight clear to me that this branch of church work has completely captivated Jerry. As far as I can find out, 'twas missions that won him over to Presbyterianism. Now I'm actually antagonistic to them—the absurdity of thrusting our beliefs on the Orientals, when our own cities reek with wickedness! After twenty centuries of Christianity we're nothing but heathens ourselves. And if they expect me, the minister's wife, to lead some foreign mission society, I shall come to a quick and an awful end."

"If I were you, dear, I wouldn't torment myself with imaginary mission societies. They seem to be the specially ordained province of nice old ladies and rich spinsters. You probably couldn't get so much as your little finger in their missionary pie! 'Twould be like trying to reach a bargain table in a Sixth avenue shop!" Such philosophy made even Persis smile. "And besides, how do you know you'll ever be a minister's wife? You may end as the spouse of a Chinese mandarin—if Jerry keeps on. 'Never trouble trouble, till trouble troubles you' is my motto."

"There's one bright spot—Jerry will be in New York for the next three years—he enters the Seminary this Fall."

"Great!" cried Sallie. "I hereby invite you to make me a three years' visit."

"You're a noble hostess, Sallie. Surely we must all do something so our whereabouts will coincide. Meanwhile Jerry is waiting for us down on the porch, and if his cigars are smoked out, he'll be frantic if we keep him any longer."

"Never mind—I'm not half through visiting! I believe in training in men to wait for you, anyway. And I have a message

for you from Jim Kimberley. We were out by the kennels—his latest fad is ruby dachshunds. It's disgusting the care they get! I told him he would much better get the fad for raising slum children on the East Side—instead of puppy-dogs. His message? Oh, yes! He said to tell you that he planned to even up his hard luck of missing you now, next winter. He said lots else, but you don't like personal remarks, so I shan't bore you. And now let's go find Jerry!"

They found him on the porch, glum and disgruntled by their delay, as Persis had prophesied. But on the way up to the East Lodge he thawed out under the fire of Sallie's banter, and monopolised the conversation expounding his new plans to her.

"I say, little one, when do you return?"

"Next week Thursday. I can't stand more than two weeks of Kimberley crêpe! Then I'm going to join father at the beach. Having had my own way," she added to Persis, "I can afford to be nice the rest of the summer."

Dumbfounded, Persis turned to inspect her. She saw a girl who had confessedly set her heart on the conquest of a certain man, who had planned to monopolise him for one whole month, whatever befell thereafter; who despised the seashore; and who had been accustomed to have her own way since infancy. She had fallen short of the conquest, having left the home of her heart's desire and the chance of fellowship with him, to pass most of her time with her friend, Anne Buel. Moreover she was on the point of returning for a three months' stop at a place she hated. And withal she was losing and returning lightheartedly, with good grace, and no symptoms of heart-break. Conscious of how hard she herself took disappointment, she silently envied the girl whose philosophy of life embraced so much plasticity and comfort.

"I'm glad you return so soon," said Jerry. "For I'm going to be on the East Side all summer doing settlement work, and I shall want to feel you're within reach."

Persis winced: she had supposed that he was going to spend his vacation with her in Tinkham, as always.

"Jerry, the East Side is a fearsome place for anybody as fastidious and squeamish as you are." Sallie warned, solemnly. "There are iniquitous morals and dire contagions and pernicious odours hovering around, lying in wait for such as you. Think twice before you leap the chasm between New England breezes and the flesh-pots of the East Side—particularly in July weather."

"My dear Sallie, feel of that!" And he bent up his fore-arm, throwing his splendid biceps into big bumps.

She laid her finger tips daintily on the blue serge that covered his mightiness, drawing her face down into a little grimace of contempt. "Too gladiatorial," she pronounced.

He refolded his arm to greater advantage still, insisting on better appreciation of his strength.

"No—you're a spoiled child already about your muscles, and I won't admire you any more! Anyway, I'm glad you're going to be in New York this winter, and I've invited Persis to visit me."

He whistled nonchalantly, piqued at her snub. But when she tittered at him for sulking he doffed his hat low to her and said very gallantly, "I thank you! And now for the crew girls!" as the Senior shell cleaved the lake amid an echo of cheers.

CHAPTER V

THE heat and lassitude of mid-July blanketed the little town of Tinkham. To Persis, so impressionable to surroundings and atmospheres, and already over-wrought by loneliness and a certain vague mistrust of the future, the interminable summer days yet to be passed in Tinkham bore in upon her with a persistency of monotony and dreariness that began to take on a shade of despondency. She sat down in her favourite resort, the old weather-beaten bench under the cherry tree in the Hanchetts' orchard. On the grass beside her lay a copy of Carlyle's "French Revolution" and her work-basket. And while her inner consciousness was alive only to her detachment and solitude, her nervous expressive hands stitched away busily at the hem of a table-cloth. The ground seemed to exhale the summer's hot breath. The drone of insects sank to unnatural silence. A sparrow hopped out from under his umbrella of pie-plant leaf, gaped, stretched one wing, and perched in the raspberry vines, too out of spirit to even chirp. As she listened to the quietude of the orchard she felt suffocated and burdened. —more by the stillness than by the heat. Then miles away between the southern hills she saw the feathery puff of smoke from the engine of the afternoon mail train waving plumes across the hot, dry air, and a moment later caught the echo of the whistle, as the train wound through the Connecticut Valley and disappeared behind the shoulder of Mount Holyoke.

She sat breathless, trying to catch the full connotation of the sound and sight, wondering if the train brought her a letter from Jerry—Jerry voluntarily exiled and stifled in the heat and squalor of the East Side, when he might be up in the Green Mountains on his honeymoon, enjoying the results of a well-established law practice!

The thought made her clutch up her work again, as if at something which would succour her. But presently she threw her thimble as far away from her into the grass as she could, and folding her linen with final painstaking, laid it in the bottom of her work-basket. "It's hopeless," she assured herself, aloud. During the summer's solitude she had contracted the habit of talking to herself, out of sheer dearth of other companionship. "Why ruin one's eyesight hemming what won't be used for three years—perhaps never?" She picked up her copy of Carlyle and forged through twenty pages of Mirabeau's heroic struggle to transfer absolutism into people's representativeness. Then she skipped the chaos and terror till she came to the scene in the Court of Marble, where young Miomandre de Sainte-Marie descends four steps of the grand staircase to meet the deluge of fury with pleading, and, beaten back, flies from hall to hall in the van of the mob and death, to the very doors of the sleeping Marie Antoinette, with his "Save the Queen!"

But the heat of the French Revolution plus the heat of July reacted on her nerves far from soothingly. She slammed her book to, as she had thrown away her thimble, impatiently. "I'll go for a walk up the hill," she told herself, and passing her work in the kitchen door to Nancy Drake, the slim, sleek-haired New England spinster who had held the Hanchetts at her mercy for the past eighteen years, set out through the orchard. The road she took led up over a series of constantly ascending knolls to the crest of a hill that obtained a commanding view of the Holyoke range.

Ever since she had parted from her friend and her lover at Wellesley she had been unable to free herself from this new and troublous sense of unrest. She felt constantly that somewhere along the way she had lost her trail and was roaming about in circles and bypaths; she longed to gain some lofty height, where she could overlook the lowlands and get her bearings once more.

Her hill lay west of the half-mile wide strip of valley that

conducts the Connecticut River through the picturesque notch between Mount Nonotuck and Mount Holyoke. Off to the south lay the highest peak of the range, Mount Tom, its white summit house set shiningly atop the rugged verdure. The river sweeping along down from the Connecticut Lakes on its four hundred and ten mile trip to Long Island Sound, dividing New England in half, ribbed with pulp logs and littered with log-jams, bowing gracefully in and out and throwing broad meadows now into Vermont, now into New Hampshire with noble impartiality, and making its giddy leap at Bellows Falls, advances on the barrier of the Holyoke Range imperiously. With a threat to take Mount Nonotuck on the right, it wastes its energy in the Ox Bow bend, and with capricious impulse turns and hugs Nonotuck close to its east base. And just beyond the Hoyloke pass, where the Valley widens southerly, lies the little town of Tinkham, with all its quiet and smugness —its river levels tilled into rich tobacco and corn fields, its knolls and slopes plaided with meadows and apple orchards, russet ploughed lands, wind-swayed grain fields, granite-bound pastures, and rectangular timber-lots.

She had expected a vivid sunset: a fire in the west and a crimson splash of afterglow. Some such demonstration seemed the fitting celebration of the exit of a sun-god who had hurled his heat rays like javelins over the town of Tinkham every day for a week. But the whimsical god sometimes loves to paint a mellow fresco on the heavens; and while Persis watched the sallow day sink into the purple river-mists, she pondered and prayed for a faith that should take her through the next three years. After that she would have Jerry, and with him no future seemed too difficult.

Only three years to wait, and both of them so young! Or was it the very fact of youth that made waiting so hard? Could she ever bear it, she asked herself, if the day came when Jerry, with his characteristic impetuosity, should inform her that he

could better meet the growing demands of the years, could more readily seize the larger opportunity, if an early marriage had not handicapped his studies? No; that would be just the kind of a thing she could not bear. Better to learn patience now, to renounce this choice bit of youth together, than to put a stumbling-block in Jerry's path by setting any limitation to his ambitions or aspirations! The thought of limitation clutched her imagination, grew, and thrived until it became a phantom that shadowed all of Jerry's career. It was the first time in her life that she had even conceived of any limit to him whatsoever. Looking forward she had never beheld him in any but the great white light of preëminent sucesss: failure had no kinship with her king. But now this new haunting something echoed horribly through her mind—what if Jerry should fail, what if Jerry should fail?

Then the splendid poise of her mental and physical being, and the corresponding serenity of soul, asserted themselves once more—as lifelong habits of self-control always do in times of distress. And as for that bad old suspicion about Jerry failing —if it came to that they would face failure together. If, in his engrossing and rather scatter-brained project for reforming the world, he went down and out, it was for her to stand by, sustain him if she could, and go out with him if she must. Meanwhile she must find something to do—in work lay her salvation. She must find it quickly, before the gold in the sunset faded—this magic labour that was to save her from herself.

She took another turn around the hilltop, a mass of choices and possibilities emerging to meet her new need. And out of her speculations she hit upon a plan that satisfied her conditions: she would go off to some hospital and learn to be a trained nurse.

When she arrived at the kitchen door, she was met by Nancy Drake, who announced that supper was "done" and that Mr. and Mrs. Hanchett had gone for a drive "in the new buggy."

As an after-thought, and something of a concession to irresponsible youth, she further vouchsafed that Persis would find some supper on the end of the kitchen table. The only light in the room was a tallow candle: Nancy Drake manufactured such, and personally never used anything else for illuminating purposes. If other women preferred to risk their complexions and lives to the smoke and treachery of kerosene lamps, why—well and good. It was not Nancy Drake's lookout. As for *her*, give her the safety and comfort of a good old-fashioned tallow dip.

There on the shiny white oil-cloth of the kitchen table sat Persis's solitary meal. Nancy Drake herself ate with the family and in turn, considered it no humility for delinquent members of the household to eat in her kitchen. Prominently beside the blue and white earthen ware plate lay a letter in Jerry's bold address. Nancy Drake had a canny curiosity about Persis's mail: when *she* was young, girls were not allowed to receive streams of letters from menfolks. Unmindful that Nancy Drake watched her sedulously, Persis opened her letter and read:

2 A. M.

Beloved:

Have been out in the harbour all day on a hospital boat, watching babies die of starvation and ill-feeding. Am headachy and too depressed to write. Keep well and happy for

Your Jerry.

A wave of disappointment and unsatisfied longing swept over her as she folded the inadequate scrap and tucked it in the front of her shirtwaist. The candle caught the faint breeze that floated through the half-open window, gasped for its life, and went out. After some incoherent mumbling over the waste of good matches, Nancy Drake prowled around in the dark for the mantel shelf, and finally laid hands on a mug of lamp-lighters. It was one of her favourite theories that people

with two hands and their strength should never be caught idle; and since Nancy Drake was nothing if not consistent, in her odd moments of freedom from toil she produced lamplighters. Cutting waste newspapers into narrow foot-lengths, and moistening her seamed forefinger and thumb on her tongue, with a dexterous whisk of her bony hand and a final pinch intended to prevent her product from "leaking" smoke, she kept the expenses of the Hanchett household well clipped, as far as matches went. And now, having provided herself with one of her tributes to economy, she went to the kitchen stove, and by dint of much coaxing and breath-blowing, restored her tallow dip to consciousness.

Hurriedly eating her biscuit and raspberries, Persis went to her room and wrote a rapid note of application to the Training School of the General Hospital, on the East Side of New York. And withal she took a strange satisfaction in following up Jerry's tactics of signing away his time and self, without consultation or advice from anybody. She felt perturbed and uncommonly nervous at what she had done, wondering at her outcome. Sealing her application with nervous hands, she hurried to the village to post it. Then she sat down on the porch to wait for the Hanchetts' return. A full moon was swinging into place over the rim of Mount Norwottock, accentuating her loneliness; she could not rid herself of the jolted sensation of one who takes a definitely important step in his career, and turns to find no one to care.

Four days later she received an answer to her application. Owing to the illness of several first-year nurses, the Training School stood in need of probationers. Would Miss Litchfield report for duty August first?

The days of reading aloud out of nondescript little red books to Mrs Hanchett (who never knew even the name of her reading matter, and always, when obliged to refer to it, called it "a book by the author of") were numbered at last; also the

irksome amiability of re-arranging her relay of invalid shawls. And the alternative of steady, live work became an exhilaration. Hiding her application blanks in the bottom of her trunk, hoping that thereby she protected them from the divinations of Nancy Drake, she found her pocketbook and set off for the village store to buy cloth for her probationer gowns.

A sprawling, rusty-gold sign proclaimed that this meeting-place of the male inhabitants of Tinkham was " 'Lisha Apley's Store." And since one-half of it was occupied by the be-figured façade of letter-boxes and the stamp window of the village post-office, the remaining space was necessarily much crowded.

The front bay-window had the appearance of an ethnological museum. Its centrepiece, a huge washtub painted vividly blue, was surrounded by three shiny tin lanterns with red globes (there being no street lamps in Tinkham, lanterns were much in vogue with pedestrians who ventured out after dark on moonless nights). Flanking these representative articles of home consumption, were two pyramids of yellow boxes, boldly proclaiming by device of pictured emblem and much lettering, that they contained the latest, most hygienic and delectable of breakfast foods. This display was an innovation on the part of 'Lisha Apley, and, in a land where meat and potatoes, pie and doughnuts, and oftentimes preserves, were considered the only breakfast, was regarded by the natives as a lack of business sagacity on his part. Suspended along on a hemp string in the rear of these pyramidal follies, and forming a sort of frieze or screen for the rest of the store, hung a long line of tanglefoot flypaper, well dotted, in convincing proof of its efficiency, with the prone carcasses of seduced flies. The chinks of space between these commodities were filled in with smaller articles of use or beauty; strings of glass beads and bits of jewellery, egg-beaters, cards of trouser buttons,

jews'-harps, pairs of wool mittens, and packages of flower-seeds.

In the middle of the store, a huge old sheet-iron, air-tight stove, its wan ash-laden base now fireless and dead, stood on a piece of battered zinc well mottled with infiltrations of tobacco spittle. Around this hospitable furnace, in the dead level of Tinkham winters, the farmers were wont to congregate at afternoon mail time, to exchange bits of village gossip, discuss the variations in the zero drops of the thermometers outside their kitchen doorways, and speculate on next summer's crops. Opposite the letter-boxes, half of the shelf room was devoted to a grocery department, necessities and edibles of all delectable kinds; cans of *petits pois* (which were considered a rare delicacy by Tinkham housewives who had fresh peas in their gardens); glass jars of pink and white striped candy; and packages of chewing tobacco. While on the centre of the counter stood an enormous annatto-coloured cheese, out of the ample disc of which had been sliced a generous, piece-of-pie shaped sample. Over the cheese was a rusty hemisphere of wire netting, around which a swarm of lusty flies buzzed in cheated and exasperated accents. The rear half was occupied by dry goods. One end of the counter was stacked to the ceiling with a pile of heavy woollen horse blankets, vigorously plaided, the opposite end being supplied with a heap of blue denim, overalls and jumpers; while all remaining shelf room was stocked with spools of thread, remnants of modestly figured "prints," blocks of calico, two kinds of linsey-woolsey, much cheesecloth, and a pile of ginghams. From these last Persis was able to extricate a block of fine blue and white check, asking the embarrassed country boy who waited on her, and who was known locally in the high capacity of " 'Lisha Apley's clerk," to cut her off twenty yards. Much agitated by her presence anyway, and totally astounded by the extent of her purchase, he made her repeat her order twice, and after having

re-measured the gingham three times, wrapped her prospective uniforms in a clumsy bundle.

. . . .

"Miss Litchfield, after you finish polishing the plumbing, you will report to Miss Boggs in the supply room and help her roll bandages."

The rustle of the head-nurse's starched skirts died away down the corridor, before Persis, on her knees before the nickel drain-pipes in the little kitchen off Ward A, was fully aware of the peremptory order that was to vary her morning routine. She arose from her lowly posture, somewhat stiffened and lame, glanced down at her shapely hands hopelessly begrimed with brass polish, and prepared herself for her new occupation. The idea of being allowed to roll bandages was pleasing to her; she was beginning to tire of the menial, monotonous tasks that had fallen to her lot for the past five weeks: this new summons came to her in the garb of promotion.

She walked lightly along the immaculate, highly polished floor of the corridor till she came to a little room on the right. Here at a table covered with narrow strips of strong unbleached muslin in a hopeless tangle, sat a pleasant-looking young woman in the uniform of the General Hospital—lavender seersucker, long white apron with shoulder-straps crossed over her plump back, and a pretty white cap with broad wings on either side flaring out beyond her fat, good-natured face. Deep, stiffly-starched cuffs of white material sheathed her sturdy arms as far as the elbows, and see-sawed uncomfortably across her broad wrists as her hands fumbled at a little device, that, with much coaxing and help, wound the muslin strips of bandage-cloth into close tight rolls.

"Are you Miss Boggs?" inquired Persis, wondering what her companion-in-bandages might be like.

"That's what I am! Are you the green probationer in Ward A?"

Rather attracted by this designation, which was vouched in the friendliest of tones, Persis answered, "Yes; and the head nurse sent me to help you."

"That's good; it's my half day and I need help. Look at this awful mess here! When do you get yours?"

"My what? I don't need any help," Persis replied, proudly conscious of her well-done morning's work.

The Junior nurse threw back her jolly face and giggled heartily. Persis had the uncomfortable sense of having said something quite amiss.

"It's plain to see you're a green one! Why, here that's what we all just live on—our half day—the chance to get out into the world again and see how people act who live decently."

"I don't know," Persis answered. "I'm not sure that probationers have half days. I haven't had one yet."

Miss Boggs drew her left fat cheek up under her left eye in a long, plump wink. "Don't let 'em impose on you," she said confidentially. "Here everybody has to look out for herself. I guess probationers need a little rest and change as well as anybody. You speak to the head-nurse about it—tell her you want to do some shopping next Thursday. That's the day the last probationer 'most always had."

"Thank you. What became of her?"

"Oh, she left! She wouldn't stay. She said she didn't come to the hospital to hoe out kitchens and sweep floors! She came to comfort the sick and dying, and learn materia medica. My! but she was an airy one!" And she quaked with a reminiscent laugh. "Don't you dare leave a single ravelling on those bandages!" she exclaimed explosively. "Pull every last one of 'em off before you dare pass 'em to me! No doctor will touch a bandage with a ravelling to it. My! but I've seen 'em throw such way across the Accident Ward! They're young, you know, and feel their oats."

Persis took the advice very seriously, redoubling her care.

"How d' you like the doctors, anyway?" Miss Boggs presently inquired.

"I? Why, I hardly know them by sight. They don't come to my kitchen, you see. And yesterday was the first day I made rounds. They all seem very gentlemanly. I hope to like them—when I begin to work with them."

Again Miss Boggs elevated her fat chin and heaved with laughter. "You better not let anybody at the General hear you say you want to like the doctors," she finally composed herself enough to say. "It's against the rules to like the staff."

Persis ignored this bit of hospital discipline. Not feeling quite sure what this silence meant, Miss Boggs, in the hope of regaining the prestige of friendliness, vouchsafed a further bit of hospital gossip.

"There's Dr. Chamberlain, now! He's far and away the nicest one of the resident staff. All the nurses are crazy about him! But he's such an aristocrat he won't have a thing to do with any of us. The ward patients worship him."

"Why?"

"Because he's so good to 'em all! He's as gentle as a woman —nearly cries when he has to hurt anybody. At the same time he's the cleverest youngster on the staff. My! but he is smart! There ain't another man among 'em that's in his class. He'll make his mark some day."

"Which one is he? Have I seen him, do you think?"

"Don't know Dr. Chamberlain yet! Do you mean to say you haven't noticed the handsome fellow that makes rounds with the visiting surgeons?"

"The one that wears glasses?"

"Yes, and has such grand manners! Well, that's Dr. Chamberlain. He has a magnificent home uptown som'ers. They say his father is awful rich. They do say, too, that Dr. Chamberlain is preparing himself to work amongst the slums som'ers. He's going to build a hospital, or something, for the poor."

"How perfect!" exclaimed Persis.

"Yes, and you ought to see him with the ward children. He's just too angelic, the way he gets around 'em all. Every last one of 'em, I believe, would lie down and let him dissect 'em. Every morning before he makes rounds in the Children's Ward, he calls all the convalescents to him and tells 'em a story. He sends a lot of 'em down to the sea-shore every summer. They say he has founded a home for tuberculosis children (that's consumption) down at Sea Bright—that he keeps a hundred poor crippled little East Siders there the year round. Ain't it grand?"

"It certainly is," Persis replied, thrilling with the new idea.

"His name is Luke, too. Somehow, sometimes when I watch the good he does and how tony he is, I think he's named after Luke in the New Testament. He was a Greek and a scholar and a doctor, you know."

Abashed to realise that these were three facts she did not know, Persis speculated on the unwisdom of judging people by their looks: she had scarcely expected so rare an appreciation of worth from the fat girl stripping ravellings.

Presently an electric bell rang twice and Miss Boggs jumped up as hastily as her bulk permitted. "Come on!" she said. "That's the head nurse ringing for us. Two bells means the visiting staff is going to make rounds. And just let me give you a tip. When you make rounds with the visiting doctors keep down in your place at the end of the line! You get so interested always, you forget your place. That's why the head-nurse glared at you so yesterday." Persis, unconscious of this ferocity, looked much surprised. "If you keep on, she'll fly at you—right before all the doctors. She likes to be the whole thing herself. And when she asks you to place the auscultation cloth, do it! Don't stand there so dummy-like. Then get back down where you belong fast as you can.'

"What's an auscultation cloth?" exclaimed Persis, never fully aware of her pitfalls until now.

Miss Boggs balanced the backs of her knuckles on either hip, and laughed immoderately.

"Why, that's the rag you carry at rounds to lay on a patient's back if the Doctor wants to listen to his lungs."

It was Persis's turn to laugh now: already her quiet humour was waking up to the absurdity of Latin names for very commonplace articles.

"Thank you," she assured Miss Boggs earnestly. "And I hope you have a very pleasant half-day."

"Oh, I shall!" agreed Miss Boggs cordially, whisking the last bit of lint off the table top with the corner of her apron. Then she added confidingly, "My best gentleman friend is going to take me to matinee, and then we're going to get our supper to the Martin."

One morning "off duty" gave Persis two hours of freedom, which she was glad to spend resting up in her own room under a fifth-story roof. Her quarters were small and very barren of furniture and ornament, but since most probationers were lodged in "the cubes" (a derelict hospital ward converted into nurses' quarters of 8 x 10 foot proportions, by board partitions only seven feet high, affording common breathing space overhead, little elbow room, and less privacy) she felt more than fortunate with her outlook, which consisted of the zigzag of fire-escapes, stumps of smudgy chimneys, a blockage of red brick masonry, and acres of tin roofing. She hung over the sill of her tiny window, stretching for a glimpse of the old square which faced the Nurses' Home. A resounding rap on her door made her draw in from her peep-hole, and the answer to her "come in" was Sallie Howe. She ran to embrace her. "You dear! I was at the window and missed you!"

"Oh, I didn't walk," Sallie drawled, luxuriously. "Jim Kimberley brought me in a hansom."

Surprise and disappointment passed over Persis's face. "Wouldn't he wait?" she asked.

"No—I begged him to, but he insisted he had to be in Boston to-night. His mother always wants him home around Thanksgiving."

"Indeed! Now tell me how you ever found my nest. Don't thump your head on that slant wall!" she warned, as Sallie whisked around to shake off her coat.

"A good-natured maid told me to keep on going up till I struck a skylight and a door. I fancy she was glad to save herself the perpendicular trip. I have been winding my weary way skyward for the past seven minutes—but here we are!" Sallie stood before her, triumphant and smart in a natty blue corduroy suit, a huge white beaver hat, and a big bunch of violets stuck in her coat. It was another of her theories that since her parents had failed so lamentably in making her beautiful, as her restitution for their remissness she was entitled to beautiful clothes. So she always ordered her apparel with lavish taste, finding therein a certain redress for her "wrongs."

"Do sit down! Allah be praised! I can still offer you a rocker." She pushed a frowsy rush-bottomed chair to the window. "'For this and all other blessings may we be truly thankful,'" she quoted.

"How that lavender uniform becomes you! And what a merciful change from the blue and white stripe of most hospitals! When I had two nurses for my typhoid, I nearly went mad counting their blue stripes! And I used to pray to high Heaven that I if died the angels might please wear pink."

"The regularity and busy life agree with me."

"Busy? Do you call it busy to be hanging out a window by your chin, spying on your friends?"

Persis laughed, as Sallie meant that she should.

"How's Jerry? Isn't he bursting with pride of you? He ought to be—you're a girl in a thousand."

"He's well. If you'll pardon me I'll lie down on my divan and rest a bit: the wards are heavy just now."

"You mean you'll lie down because you haven't a second chair to sit on. Do hospitals need donations so much? Do you see him often?" she urged. "I fancy you having such fun together odd minutes you can snatch from your slummers."

"Why—no. I'm too tired to go out much. I have to get up at quarter to six, you know."

"Heavens!"

"We try to meet twice a month, but Jerry is totally engrossed with theology and I'm so busy I forget there is a world. We've had two lovely walks in Central Park, and Saturday we plan to go down to the Battery and watch the fishes in the Aquarium."

"Youngsters! Will you ever grow up? Never mind—you're both good enough for me." Sallie hitched the rocker across uncarpeted floor-boards, drawing up beside her friend. "You sleep here, on this rack thing—don't you? You work like a dray-horse all day for the hospital, and when night comes the hospital puts you to bed on this!" Her scorn lighted on the narrow cot that jammed its head against the slant wall: her quick eyes roamed over dinginess. "You can't think how it affects me to see you here in this mean little cubbyhole—when you've always had comforts." She got up, peering into the skylight, the bureau, the closet: the only visible trace of the dainty personality she sought was a half-length picture of Persis's father and a silver button-hook, on the towel-covered top of the bureau.

"In my trunk are beautifiers and Jerry's likeness. I look at them sometimes—nights, when I miss cheer. But in the wards I'm too busy to think of myself, and when I'm off duty I'm too tired to unpack. Don't pity me," she said with a brave smile, "'tisn't as if I were attached to my green room in Tinkham. I'm consumed about that package!"

"It's a s'prise for you: you could never guess. It's a lot of Nora's frosted gingerbread. Now will you be good?"

So they visited and feasted till Persis had to go on duty again. And as Sallie swayed about to get the full image of her hat in the mirror she laid down very special injunctions. "Now remember that you and Jerry dine with me Thanksgiving. Don't you dare forget—either of you! The Darrachs are coming, too—I had to invite Nell, because she's in the family. And besides, I wanted Calvin and to get a married man you have to put up with his wife. I shall see to it that he has a lovely, homey time. Do be especially nice to him, Persis!"

"I don't know how to be nice to any man but Jerry. Still, I'll try."

"Do—to please me. And after Thanksgiving Jim and I are going to see that you get a glimpse of this good, gay, old New York! Now take care of yourself—and let me know if I can do anything for you. Good-by!"

CHAPTER VI

PERSIS sat in the dingy side-street lodgment known as the "Nurses' Parlour," anxiously watching the countenance of the stubby gilt clock, that in company with a pressed-glass empty vase and a small stucco hound adorned the mantelpiece. The ornate hands of the gilt contrivance pompously gesticulated that the hour was 10:53 of a morning. In Persis's heart the longing for change and freedom from loneliness announced that the day was Thanksgiving. She was dressed in a modest suit of gray cheviot with a turban of some soft stuff to match, the plainness of which was relieved by a bunch of violets on the left side. The costume was her first tribute to New York fashion, as well as the first lessening of her black, worn so long in respect to family losses. As she sat rigidly poised on the extreme edge of a brocade horror known in the vernacular of the local housekeeper as "the easy chair," she snapped fast and unfast the clasp of her castor glove with a nervous click.

What had detained Jerry? Why was he causing this fatal delay? He had agreed to meet her promptly at ten o'clock. And at half past four of this rapidly vanishing holiday, she reminded herself for the thirtieth time, hospital routine demanded that she report for duty in Ward A. Meanwhile there was the city to cross, the ferry to span, and a fickle train-service to transport them to Sallie's New Jersey home in time for a half-past twelve dinner. Each time she went over the progressive steps of the delay and the journey, her impatience added some new detail or possibility of misconnection, until she worked herself up to a pitch of feverish vexation. Unable any longer to sit still, she relaxed her hold on the festive

brocade, and with a glide born of four months of rapid and continuous trips up and down the length of Ward A, paused in front of the dust-streaked window to scan the street. Her view was somewhat modified by the grimy, rusty palings of the iron fence that obviously shielded the precincts of the nurses' home from alien and trespassing influences. But to Persis, peering out across a gloomy side street for her tardy lover, the iron fence symbolised most unpleasantly the bars of a cage. The sky was not in a holiday mood, but lay low over the square rooftops, sulking in drab clouds. Gusty little spirals of tan-coloured dust swirled around the red-brick corner, the only live thing in sight. Not even a rag picker or a newsboy broke in upon the emptiness of the street—much less a delinquent Jerry!

With a little gesture of vexation, she made several circuits of the parlour, avoiding a red plush ottoman and a relay of foot-stools with buttoned-down plump tops that reminded her unhappily of a "batch" of Nancy Drake's raised biscuit. Silk skirts swished through the hall, the front door banged and at a discreet distance down the street she watched the newest probationer link arms with a swain and skedaddle for the Third Avenue elevated. Meanwhile the ornate clock hands inscribed another half of their hourly circle, and still she waited in nervous solitude. Four more vital minutes passed to eternity and then the door bell gave a noisy insistent peal, which she met with unwonted promptitude.

"Oh, Jerry!" she cried. "We're so late and we'll spoil Sallie's lovely dinner! Why did you waste an hour and a half?"

"*Waste*—my dear girl! I've been up since five o'clock studying till I can't see straight! I'm preparing a special thesis on The Mystery of Human Freedom as Affected by the Divine Will. I came near not getting off at all! Meanwhile, what's the rush? We have all of this beautiful holiday, free and together—and I purpose to enjoy it. Here, give me a kiss!"

He paused, with his hand on the door knob, bending down to her.

"Hush, Jerry! These dark walls have ears! It's too late to dilly-dally." And she turned her face away, while he haughtily opened the door and let her pass out.

"That's just the point," she went on, hurrying to the corner. "We haven't the whole day free—at least I haven't. I've got to be back on duty at half-past four."

"Nonsense!" exploded Jerry, sweeping her around to the off-side, as he shouldered a big whirl of dust-laden wind. "You surely don't have to work holidays. We'll telephone them when we get to Sallie's—that'll settle it."

"But Jerry—you don't seem to understand! Sick and dying people have to be cared for holidays, as well as any other time."

"Let the other nurses take care of them to-day," insisted Jerry, beaming with his own solution of the problem. "To-day *I* need you. I've got such a lot of things to talk over with you! And besides, I've hardly had a glimpse of you since you entered the hospital."

"Ah—then you'll have to take better advantage of my off-duty, Jerry! To-day I positively must be back here on this very side street by half past four. The Senior nurse is sick with tonsillitis, and the Junior has last hours. The ward work really rests on me and a new probationer."

Jerry still looked gloomy and unconvinced. Hailing a cross-town car with unnecessary display of authority, he hurried her on board, and they jolted along to the ferry-house in moody silence. On the boat there was no benevolent magic to break the unhappy spell. Crowds of Yiddish pleasure-seekers, lustrous-eyed women bedecked in spangled plush capes and "opera hats" of gay tulle and bedraggled white ostrich plumes, escorted by emphatic, over-plump men in gaudy neck-wear, jabbed elbows and ribs with rotund, good-natured Germans decamping to Hoboken music halls for a day of jollity

and beer. While every available niche of space between was cemented with podgy, shiny-cheeked children of both these prolific races, sucking pretzels and taffy sticks.

Jerry, by dint of his broad shoulders and fine courtesy, made a passage for her through this jubilant throng, and presently they found themselves on the front deck of the ferry-boat, facing a dull sky-line partially obliterated by haze and smoke. She looked up and down the river through the enveloping grayness. On both sides, the river-front and sky-line, now crenellated, now embattlemented with profile of noble buildings, gave no sharp outlines. The only bit of gay colour came from the flags projecting out over the water-front from the abutments of the docks of numerous steamship companies. Both river-banks were well faced with valiant ocean-liners moored at their docks, looking for all the world to Persis like huge cattle stanchioned in dismantled, flooded barns. From their topmost masts and rigging dozens of foreign and marine signal flags and pennants fluttered in the north wind like swarms of gay-winged aquatic flies. And while she still gazed on the water picture, with Jerry glum and preoccupied beside her, from far up the river she saw a gray cloud approaching, sweeping along impressively, now low over the water, now soaring up skyward till the white lining of their spacious wings caught up what brightness the day afforded—and finally separated into individual sea-gulls. On they swept toward her, sailing past in the rear of the ferry-boat, soon to reappear on their voyage to the Narrows. "How low they fly—they must be very hungry," she told herself, longing to have Jerry enjoy the pretty picture with her. But he still stood concentrated in his mood or meditations, forbidding light interruption. With her quick response to physical environment she reflected that the haze and the grayness of the river were sadly in harmony with their own mood. The next moment a lively wind swept down the Hudson in pursuit of the vanishing gulls and dashed little flecks of

icy spray up onto the front deck, in her face. Her spirit revived under the chance restorer. It was not too late yet to recall the holiday spell. And she knew so well how to bring Jerry to terms!

She waited a moment till his plastic face had relaxed from gloom into its characteristic, thoughtful mould. Then she turned to him vividly, and with one of her rare, radiant smiles, said, "Do you like my new gray suit, Jerry dear?"

The sweetness of her tones carried far beyond the childish significance of her words. Her yielding attitude, her generous willingness to "make up," swept Jerry off his feet, far out of the little bay of their quarrel into the open sea of her charm and his chivalry.

He turned impetuously to her, his quick blood never far below his ruddy skin. "Dear heart!" he whispered, "What wouldn't I give to flee the publicity of this boat! Forgive me, darling. Do I *like* your new suit? I adore every detail and line of you—I worship you!"

All his old boyhood passion for her swept over him tumultuously, the accumulation of their love-life of twenty-three years. He transfixed her with his gaze. "Sometimes I'm afraid to love any earthly thing as I love you. I have moments when it comes to me that I love you better than my God." He paused, to gain control of his voice, and shifted his position till she felt the impress of his nearness against her, while his right shoulder shielded her from the north.

He still gazed deep into her eyes; at last he let his own travel up and down the slender length and fit of her costume. He tilted his head to one side critically, half shut his eyes, and said, "Yes, I like your new suit. The fit of it just pleases my sense of perfect proportion. The colour of it exactly matches your eyes. And that dash of violet on your hat just brings out their deep grayness. Altogether you satisfy my craving for the æsthetic. You're far and away the most beautiful girl I've

seen in New York. What a blockhead I was to forget a bunch of violets! That's the one last touch necessary to etch the picture of you on my heart for always; I have it now—there's a florist's on the way up to Sallie's!"

As if in high approval of reunited lovers, just as the train took its moderate start from Hoboken, the November sun routed the leaden haze. A little farther along it caught up the tans and browns of the Hackensack Meadows, the seared lopped sedges and the fluff of over-ripe catkins revolving past the car windows, with a luminous russet light.

"Remember the last time we crossed the Meadows?" Jerry inquired, fondly. "It was a year ago last summer when I came out to take you back to New England. And all these bleak little waterways and ditches with their ugliness and scale of muddy ice were alive with pink bloom of marshmallows."

"Yes, and you said if we were travelling in Europe and met such a glory of wild flowers, that we'd rave and send a post-card of them home."

"Oh, but I made a much more prophetic and a wiser forecast than that, girl of mine! If you'll recall, I said that the fanciest piece of engineering around New York was the reclamation of the Hackensack Meadows, transferring them into another annex of the City. How it thrills one's imagination!—twenty-five miles of factory sites, building lots and homes! It can't be pumped out, either, dear—the soil is too heavy. 'Way back as far as the Passaic River the silt lies sixty feet deep and in spots, deeper. No steam pumps here—they'll have to ditch and dig it out, slowly, toilfully. It will be a pretty sight, when once it's under way! You and I will live to see it done, darling."

With one of his sudden, impetuous turns, he shifted her bodily around. "Look back—look at once! No—not at Snake Hill—to the rear, toward Hoboken! Catch the end view of the city, with its rows and rows of smallish, regular, cube-like houses perched on that hillside? See how the sunlight lies

on the dull yellows and grimy whites of the houses, subduing their rear outlines and monotonous angles into the soft tints of the gray horizon? That's all—tell me now if you've ever seen any city in America that was quite like it. Doesn't it stir up in your fancy the memory of something pictorial and foreign?"

With half-shut eyes she caught the receding view, as the train plunged across the Meadows. "Yes, I get it—the impression of something charming and alien, totally unlike the common repute of Hoboken."

"Ah! I felt sure of you! You are a perpetual joy to me in your appreciation of all that's beautiful in its transiency. And now turn around and pay all your attention to me, while I tell you a pretty story about that view of Hoboken."

She had never outgrown her childish love of a good tale. Jerry knew this, and more than once had taken advantage of it, either to re-impress her with the sense of his charm, or to tide over trying moments of high-pitched or differing feelings. So now she settled down close to his elbow, and her lord went on.

"Remember my class-mate at Harvard, that sample of Chinese gentry and mysticism? Well, once he and I were going over this road—if I remember we had been up to Morristown to see a Princeton fellow on some football business. We were just about here on the Meadows, facing the other way, of course, when in the midst of our discussion over the latest game he stopped, spell-bound and magnetised. I thought he'd seen the ghosts of some of his illustrious ancestors! I thought he was going dippy right there on my hands. Tears came to his dreamy, whizzy eyes, and his face took on a longing and affection pitiful to see. 'The Orient,' he finally choked out. 'Yonder on the hillslope—comes a vision of my East. Not in San Francisco—not in all your land—have I found so true a picture of the approach to Canton.' And every time the poor, homesick chap came to New York he used to take this

trip across the Meadows to get his glimpse of Canton. Do you like my story?"

"Immeasurably! Tell me another."

"Not now. But if you are a very good little girl all day, on our way home I'll tell you more about my friend Tai Kwan. By Zeus! Watch that Pennsylvania train race us! It's going to beat us, too."

"Of course it is! What do you expect on this road? Sallie loves to watch them. She won't go in to New York on the trains that don't race the Pennsylvania across the Meadows. She has looked them all up, and keeps a list of them stuck in the edge of her mirror."

"Do you suppose she'll let me smoke on her lace curtains? I'm perishing for a good cigar!"

"Anywhere you like! Her notion of comfort is pervasive. Now tell me about yourself, dear."

"Oh, I just slave and study from half past five till eleven o'clock at night. I'm trying to force time, and pass off my theology, so I can have you. Sometimes," he added waveringly, "I feel I made a mistake in not sticking to law."

A sudden dread seized her lest he was going to announce his return to his law-practice. She felt a need of holding him to his purpose with a firm hand.

"Jerry!—don't vacillate! Remember the standard of service you set so high, and that we're sacrificing our youth now for rich advancement in mature life." She hardly realised that she was quoting his own slogan, almost word for word, so habituated and reconciled had she become to the larger plan, and so determined was she that he should persevere in it.

"Yes, but when I'm with you, I'm overwhelmed with the sense of what I'm missing. Everything in me aches and cries out for you! I long to claim you now!"

A feeling that no lover had more of the tribute of youth and devotion to pay his betrothed mingled with the thoughts that

his was not at all the proper attitude for a man who had consecrated himself to the furtherance of God's ministry, that somehow she must rally to the support of his higher nature, his best convictions. And as a preliminary to this she ignored his intensity and said simply, "It is well that we're both so busy, Jerry—that hardly a moment of our time remains for ourselves."

"That's the idea, Persis! And that's why I don't come to see you oftener."

The confession of weakness and the new consciousness of the power of her love over him thrilled her. At the same time it put her on guard over both herself and him, and started her off on new tactics. Until now she had felt piqued and hurt that he had neglected to appropriate her free afternoons and off-duties. But now—if he was protecting himself from his love of her in order to devote himself the more whole-heartedly to his theology, she would meet him on his own ground. So she spoke up for them both, and the sweet sincerity of her voice matched the fineness of her sentiment.

"As we're employed, dear, time passes by like a whirlwind. When the dust clears away it will be June—and theology and waiting done. Our work is our salvation. It is enough for me to just know you're in the city, near me, that we're both well, and that our love endures."

Her reasonableness and generosity went over Jerry with a fresh wave of gratefulness. The din of the car wheels made him bend very close to whisper, "I'll make good some day, darling—some day when 'the barriers fall.' Just believe me and love me—and wait, for Jerry." The old endearing plea, a relic of their childhood, made something tighten in her throat. They both kept silence while the train plunged ahead to recover the time lost in its tardy start from the sheds back in Hoboken. But before it slowed down for their stop, Jerry laid his hand on her arm and said, "Just understand, dear,

that when I don't call on you I'm only acting in self defence! But remember always that Jerry is right there in the big city, near his girl—within an hour of her in case she ever needs him."

He helped her off the car platform and put her in the Howe's "depot wagon" that Sallie had sent to meet them just as Jerry had bounded up the front steps of the Nurses' Home. The impatient driver, mindful of his own belated dinner, whisked them up the avenue at too smart a pace to stop for violets. The only conversation during the short drive was Jerry's. He seemed to be filling in and bridging over the next three years happily for Persis as well as for himself.

"I just want to say, dear, that you are not to deprive yourself of all pleasures while you wait for me. You are always at liberty to go about with your friends. It would be a comfort to me to know you were not too lonely."

A moment later the front door of the Howe homestead burst open and Sallie appeared on the piazza.

"You dear things to come! Those wretched trains—they're always late on holidays! Come right in—we're all so glad to see you. I've been telling Calvin and Nellie all about you. Lay your wraps here—we won't waste time to go upstairs—unless Jerry wants to prink. Are you so hungry instead, Jerry? Well, be patient children—dinner is served. Oh, Persis! I love your new suit!"

And Sallie in holiday mood and attire, welcomed her belated guests with becoming warmth and ease. For three generations the name Howe had been synonymous with Hospitality. It was as natural for Sallie to make people feel at home in her father's establishment, as it was for her to take life easily and exaggerate.

She turned now, with the ease of one to the manner born. "Nellie, you'll recall Persis Litchfield. She was my paragon room-mate at Wellesley. Mr. Wadhams—Jerry—let me present to you, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Darrach."

She turned and taking Persis by the hand, led her along till she faced the giant. "Persis, this is Nellie's husband—my little cousin Cal." She made her speech with a droll dignity and a smile went around the circle, for when Calvin Darrach arose majestically from the depths of his morris chair to meet the presentations, he had towered three inches above Jerry; and Jerry held the undisputed and enviable honour of being the tallest man in his class at Harvard.

"Father," as a lovely old man, newspaper in hand, entered the room from the library beyond, "you'll be glad to welcome Mr. Wadhams and Persis." He shook hands with the newcomers with a charming grace. "Won't you take Persis in to dinner, Father, and keep her on your left. Nellie as a member of the Howe family shall have your right. Jerry, I commend Mrs. Darrach to your care. Having sampled it so long, I know its delights. Calvin, I've kept you for myself," she whispered, reaching high up to take his arm.

With the instinct of the true hostess, having thus skilfully placed her guests, she opened up a line of festive banter and friendly good cheer with Calvin and Jerry on her right and left. While at the farther end of the table, daintily decorated in autumn tints and dinner favours in the form of childish jokes, her aristocratic old father charmingly interspersed affectionate remarks to Nellie and Persis with his skilful carving of the turkey. Presently, as his task grew obstinate enough to engross her father's entire attention, Sallie engaged Nellie in her dialogue with Jerry. And so Persis found herself committed to sociability with a strange man. She gave him a rapid and keen survey, somewhat prejudiced by Sallie's graphic delineations in the past. She felt at once and intuitively that he would be charming to converse with, and that she was going to like him. He was very good to look upon, moreover; she told herself so twice, and reflected that he was almost as handsome as Jerry.

He turned to her now with a winsome deference that somehow conveyed far beyond his words his opinion of her high superiority. "Sallie tells me, Miss Litchfield, that you are learning to be a trained nurse at the New York General. Won't you talk to me about your work, please. I'm so interested."

His attitude and tone promised something more than the casual, perfunctory terms of conventionality. She wondered searchingly why so grand a man should want to hear her talk about ward routine? She had somewhere, doubtless during her college days, picked up the very youthful notion that it was poor form to discuss one's own occupation, being ignorant of the great and happy fact that in so doing mortals pass their choicest exchanges of thought and personality, the fruit of their own high specialisation and heart-throbs.

She would as soon have thought of discussing her hospital experiences here at Sallie's dinner with a strange man, as she would have expected Calvin Darrach to branch out into some treatise on slag or the manufacture of steel bolsters. As she met the sincerity of his request and the frankness of his smile, she noticed that his eyes were dark blue, like Jerry's, only much steadier and graver in their light. He passed her an olive, and this added mark of quite natural approach and attention, helped her to regain her confidence in him.

"It's all so perfect! So big and vital, too. But I'm not far advanced enough yet to speak very comprehensively. Sometimes, though," and she turned to him with one of her little, impulsive bursts of confidence that always had the effect of impressing her listener as a compliment paid, however trivial the communication, "sometimes I get so interested, that I even forget there is a world outside the walls of my ward."

Calvin Darrach met this little confession, so charmingly vouched, with a long sweeping gaze that dwelt on her quiet face, momentarily aglow with the light of enthusiasm. A moment ago in the reception room, he had thought her cold and

reserved. Now he found her alive and alight. His look lingered a moment, as if he had regained some vision of feminine possibilities, long since lost.

"It's refreshing," he said presently, "to hear a girl of this age emphasise the fact that she is deeply interested and loyal to some cause outside of her own special circle."

Persis felt a little thrill, in response to the impersonal fineness of his compliment. It made her feel in a new way that the toil and the routine were somehow less deadly and ear-marking. While she was trying to think of something to say in return that was as nice, she heard Mrs. Darrach's plaintive notes from across the table, "Oh, Calvin dear, my salt shaker won't work—lend me yours, please. I ask pardon, Sallie. I know how careful Nora usually is."

With a flash of unwonted rapidity Sallie thrust her own salt shaker into Jerry's hand. Jerry, nervously responsive to her haste, placed it beside Nellie's plate before Calvin had time to withdraw his attention from the girl beside him and comply with his wife's request. It was all over in a second. And before Sallie had the chance to launch another topic, Mrs. Darrach leaned her arms along the table edge and fastening her pale blue eyes upon Persis said, "Do tell us *all* some of your entertaining hospital escapades, Miss Litchfield. I'm sure you must see such amusing characters. Doesn't the squalor and poverty of the East Side depress you? I'm sure it would me."

"Tell her about the plump Miss Boggs who shadows you with care, Persis," Sallie offered.

Persis smiled and held to Nellie's question. "Sometimes it does. But usually I'm so engrossed trying to better the squalor that I don't find time to be depressed."

If the answer was a bit too sincere, Sallie covered the break with, "Jerry, do pass Mrs. Darrach the salted almonds. Please everybody eat a great many—because I did them myself. Nell,

do you realise that Mr. Wadham's classmate is your friend from Baltimore?"

Having restored the balance of conversation once more, Sallie urged her father to be re-helped to the cranberry sauce. And Calvin Darrach took up his conversation where the catastrophe of his wife's salt shaker had left it. "The reason I asked you to tell me about your work, Miss Litchfield, is because I'm deeply interested in hospitals myself just now. We're on the point of building a small one up in my town—the little suburb of Bentley, in York State, you know. I'm on the building committee, and I am also trying to finance the affair. In a small town this is oftentimes as troublesome as it is essential. There are so many wealthy old ladies to placate, so many differing individual wires to pull. But the great need of a hospital in Bentley keeps me courageous and persistent," he added, with one of his confiding smiles.

"How perfect to be able to build a hospital! Of all things, I think that's what I'd love best to do."

He looked at her again, glad of her sympathetic interest. How her enthusiasm vitalised her, he told himself! Here was a young woman of flesh and blood, with some abiding interest in humanity thrown in. And while he still regarded her, with a wistful little expression in his eyes, he said, "During the last ten minutes, Miss Litchfield, you have used that much-belaboured adjective 'perfect' twice. Will you be so kind as to define for me your idea of perfection?"

She looked away from him swiftly, glancing down at her butter spread. After a moment's thought she turned to him again with, "Once when I was a small child and browsed about amongst my father's books I came upon a definition of perfection that has clung to my memory for many years." She laid a grave emphasis on her last two words, and Calvin appreciated that she was trying to convey to him something of the long extent of her worldly wisdom. "The book said that

perfection was the product of Beauty and Truth. But since I have seen so much of the world," and here he struggled to suppress his smile, knowing it would make her draw into herself again, "I have felt the need of another dimension to perfection, and so I have added Goodness to the length and breadth, as the dimension of height." And then, as she was keen enough to catch the trailing end of his smile, she added by way of justifying herself, "So many things that are true and beautiful are not good, you know. But all goodness is true, and when beauty is thrown in it seems to me that we have a state as near perfection as this world of ours affords." Much embarrassed now by the depth of self-revelation into which he had led her, she again concealed herself behind the mantle of her reserve.

Unmindful still of the chatter on either side of him (Mr. Howe being in the midst of a sympathetic discourse on his niece's ill health) Calvin continued to look at her. What a revelation of the girl's inner self her simple words were! How Puritanical she was! He reflected that during his life of thirty-four years of varied experience with femininity he had known two or three women who had stood preëminently for truth, to him; that he had met scores who were quite satisfied to rest on the plane of beauty and barter their own for the chance winning of life's high prizes; that his own wife made beauty her daily meat and drink and raiment. He could even recall the stretches in his experiences when, aside from purity, all he really demanded of a woman was that she be beautiful. But never before had he met a woman who stickled so for goodness, and yet who combined it so harmoniously with the other two attributes of perfection, that she entirely escaped the lot of being flat and tiresome. In fact, as these finer shades of differentiation flitted through his sensibilities, with his gaze still upon her till he felt his regard was fast becoming a rudeness and a stare, as well as conspicuous to the rest of the table, he was above all else about her conscious of her beauty. He was on the point of telling

himself that the young woman beside him with her flower-like pallor and misty gray eyes, her magnetic aloofness, her curves of womanhood and the fineness of all her cell structure was almost incomparable to any woman he had ever known.

Before he had shaken his new impressions down amongst his deep perceptions far enough to reply to her rationally, Sallie rang for another course. The conversation became general, then personal; and finally Calvin found himself listening with a new interest to the young divinity student opposite him, wondering what manner of a man such a girl had chosen for her best-beloved. After listening a few moments to the vividness of Jerry's discourse on the latest advances toward the Universality of Christianity, he said to himself "Brilliant—of course! A good sort—and the kind that women take to. Too visionary, though—unstable! She deserves excellence."

With the feeling that the man at her left must have found her very dull to remain silent so long, and remembering Sallie's request that she "be nice to Calvin," Persis made a fresh attempt at conversation, this time striking the unfailingly winning note of personalities. "I envy you your hospital, Mr. Darrach," she said.

"Don't do that. Instead, allow me to come and visit yours. Mrs. Darrach and I are often in New York. I still have two or three points in construction hanging loose in my mind. Perhaps I should find the suggestion or the inspiration I need, at the General. Will you let us come?" Nothing could have been more natural and frank than his tone. Before Persis could express her pleasure and cordiality toward such a happy prospect, Nellie leaned her braceleted arms out on the table, and bending forward beyond the fire of Jerry's banter till she caught Sallie's eye, said, "My dear, if you'll excuse me, I'll be obliged to go upstairs and lie down a few moments. I'm so sorry to disturb your lovely dinner—but I feel a bit faint."

Sallie arose instantly, and going to the side of her cousin's

chair, laid a cool hand on her forehead. "Poor Nell—perhaps the room is too close. Jerry, do lower the farther window a bit. Never mind, Nell: we have a trained nurse right here in the house if anything *should* happen to you."

Jerry, with the distressed air of a man who has allowed the lady at his elbow to succumb to conditions he might have forestalled, sprang to open a window. Calvin laid down his napkin, looking at his wife anxiously. Nellie gave a wan smile, saying, "The effect of the trip down and crossing the ferry amongst so many odious people must have overtaxed me. Calvin dear, won't you please help me upstairs. I'll be all right, friends, after I've lain down half an hour," she added reassuringly.

Calvin, with gentle solicitude, helped his wife to the desired haven on the second floor, and Sallie, returning to the head of the table, ordered the half-finished course removed. But try as she would to restore lightness, the episode of Nellie's faint had clipped the wings of the holiday gayety. Jerry felt that in some unaccountable way he should have known that the room was too close for a frail little creature like Mrs. Darrach. Mr. Howe was much disturbed about his niece's inability. Persis suddenly became conscious of the fact that she must be on duty at half-past four and sought her watch, hurriedly. Sallie alone seemed unsympathetic and annoyed. "Just like Nell to spoil everything," she muttered.

Half an hour later the lovers stood in the Howes' hall saying good-by. Nellie, as a last crowning token of graciousness, had descended from her faint to see them off, and stood with a gold-topped bottle of smelling salts in one hand and a becoming air of lassitude on her fragile face, leaning on her husband's arm.

"Good-by, Mr. Howe—you must please keep well until I know quite how to take care of you. Good-by, Sallie dear! It has been so lovely to be in a home once more!" Persis certainly looked the part of a refreshed guest, as she repeated the

old, old leavetaking of the homeless. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Darrach. I hope you'll soon feel better. When you and Mr. Darrach are in the City some day soon, I hope you will both find time to call on me." She nodded to Calvin, as if in acquiescence to his unanswered request, and ran lightly down to the carriage block.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the head nurse's table, down the darksome length of Ward B one 16-candle power electric lamp sent its solitary gleam through the white muslin wings of the ward screen. The two opposing rows of narrow iron beds, their daytime uniformity and precision tumbled into ill-defined outlines by the prone forms upon them, dwindled off into ghostly indistinctness down at the farther end of the ward. The deep stertorous breathing of men fortunate in sleep, the laboured moaning respirations of those oppressed by pain and sleeplessness, the stricken shadowy shapes of those tossing in mild delirium, all seemed to Persis to blend into the grim background of weary night-watches, with a kindred gruesome harmony. With a noiseless step and a half-shrinking, half-fearsome feeling that her seasoned reason bade her discard as too childish, she made a rapid round of her night charges, noting the quality of the sleep here, the kind of respiration there, and the character of the pulse beat of the latest operative case. Beside the comparative space and seclusion of the corner bed, she paused before a man with hot hands and lowered head tossing helplessly from side to side. She laid her cool hand across his forehead and whispered, "Is the pain so much worse, Muth?"

"Awful—awful pain, lady—I can't stand another night like this. Won't you get the Doctor to give me something, lady—something that will put me to sleep?"

"Be brave a few minutes, Muth—there's a good patient. When the Doctor makes rounds at midnight I'll get a sleeper for you."

"Midnight!" he groaned. "Good God! wait till midnight, when every minute is like a week of hell."

She turned from him, sick with her helplessness, and tiptoeing back to the head of the ward, noted by the desk lamp that by Muth's computation of time he still had ten weeks of agony before she could grant him oblivion. To take the edge off her own nervous wait, she gathered up the pile of night records, and taking them out to the table in the hall, began to chart the two-hour temperatures. Presently a firm light step sounded down the farther corridor, and she looked up to meet the greeting of Dr. Chamberlain.

"How's Muth?" he inquired, without preliminary. "His temperature gone up? Not sleeping and in great pain? Poor chap—those double amputations are enough to kill a man with pain, let alone shock and hemorrhage. Give him a hypodermic of an eighth, and repeat in an hour, if he still suffers."

She hastened to fill the order, leaving the doctor to peruse the pile of charts. When she returned he laid his eye-glasses down on the top of the records, blinked his eyes two or three times, and leaning wearily against the cold tiling of the corridor wall, looked at her steadily. His attitude expressed a hopelessness and depression that revealed him to her in a new light. Until now his optimism and unswerving hopefulness had seemed to her his dominant traits.

"Do you know, Miss Litchfield, sometimes this work paralyses my courage." He added a wan smile to his words, as if he realised their dejection and would modify it.

"You're tired," she said. "You've been up till all hours writing up histories and dressing ambulance cases. When you've had some sleep or a good long walk in Central Park, you'll get back your sense of perspective."

"Perspective—that's what I've lost! I see all the world through a veil of sterilised gauze, deeply tinted an iodoform yellow, and bedraggled with the moisture of pain." He spoke

with deep emotion and more freedom than she had ever fancied possible to him—his reserve of breeding was always so palpable. She reflected, too, that he had probably just come from equally depressing spectacles in the women's surgical wards. And her own sympathies and understandings arose to meet his.

"You need a whole long day out doors," she said.

"Thank you—you have given me my cue again. To-morrow I shall go down to my place at the sea-shore. I have a little scheme down there that's good fun. And now, Miss Litchfield, if you're not too busy with your midnight temperatures, will you be good enough to give me a glass of hot milk? I feel chilled—and perhaps it will help me to sleep."

She went to the ward kitchen, a neat miniature of a household cookery, and presently returned with a glass of steaming milk and a plate of toast.

"Ah—that is inviting! Won't you have a glass for yourself? This night work is dreary business—and you must not break down."

His little afterthought for her seemed to her so natural. From childhood she had been accustomed to the chivalrous care of men—Jerry had seen to that. So she only said, "Thank you, no. We night nurses dine a little past one." But all the same Dr. Chamberlain's solicitude gave her pleasure. She found herself comparing his attributes with the puffed-up, assumed dignity of the other young house surgeons, with a resultant decidedly in his favour.

After six weeks of night work, when the hideous noises of the East Side clashed on her nerves and broke into her forced sleep of daytimes, reducing her eight pounds in weight, she awoke from her intermittent and insufficient rest in the middle of a March afternoon, to answer a knock on her door. A summons from the Superintendent of Nurses requested her to report at the office in twenty minutes. Somewhat perturbed as

to what this ominous message might forecast, she hurried into her uniform and presented herself before the august personage of the Training School. She showed her lack of out-door life in her pallor, which now became wanness; but the freshness and fit of her lavender and white uniform concealed these physical damages, while the unexpected words of approval mended her courage.

"Miss Litchfield, I have requested you to come to my office to speak with you in regard to two or three points in your work, and to tell you that, on the whole, I am rather pleasantly surprised with the way you have carried off your night duty."

The Superintendent of Nurses curbed her double chin well in against her high stiff collar, and gazed unflinchingly at Persis over the top rim of her gold-mounted spectacles. After about one minute of this profound regard, she proceeded. "In many ways I make the deportment of a young nurse during night work my test of her ability to go on with us here at the General Hospital or to go back to her home." She uttered these axioms of her own astuteness with the naked, cold precision of some mighty headsman. "I feel fairly impressed with the idea that you are capable of pulling yourself up to the high mark of our Training School standard. In fact, I feel that it would not prove a point of too great indiscretion on my part if I risked placing you in a position of responsibility."

Persis had had nothing to eat since some matter of nondescript fry at half-past seven in the morning. A sensation of faintness came over her, but she managed to expel a weak "Thank you."

"To-morrow is my day of the month for transferring my head-nurses," the Superintendent of Nurses resumed, solemnly. "At present we are under a disastrous shortage of head nurses. Two have overworked and consequently are confined to the infirmary with grippe. The Training School is under the trying necessity of forcing its Junior nurses into places of vast trust.

Altogether it is totally averse to my policy to promote such inexperienced and, in many ways, inefficient young nurses as you are, so rapidly to positions of great responsibility. However, necessity compels me to risk the hazard of placing you in charge of the Children's Ward."

Persis stood dazed at this turn in her affairs. Ever since her arrival at the Hospital she had looked forward to service amongst the children as the climax of her first year of work.

"You are not to feel at all puffed up with the honour I now confer upon you, Miss Litchfield. In fact there are several points in your deportment that I feel compelled to draw your earnest and strict attention to."

Again a little tremor passed up and down Persis's spine. The bare walls of the severe, dark office seemed so very high, looming above her and chilling her body just as the coldness of the woman before her froze her affections.

"The chiefest of these points, Miss Litchfield, is your disregard of ward appearances. I chanced to step into Ward B this morning just after you had left your night duty, and I found several very slovenly conditions in your wake. For instance, I found that the bed-side table of one patient was on the left, defying our undeviating rule that all tables be kept at the right of bed-patients." Her tones expressed disgust incarnate.

"Oh," said Persis with relief. "I carried the table around to the left side. The man's right hand is paralysed. It's very awkward for him to have to reach over himself."

The Superintendent of Nurses eyed her Junior nurse sententiously over the top of her shiny round spectacles. "The spirit of kindliness is all very beautiful in theory, Miss Litchfield. But it is hardly the hall-mark of a well-trained, efficient nurse. Hereafter I want you to understand that leniency does not keep the corners of the bed spreads at a uniform angle—neither does it leave the window shades on the same level."

It did not need further elaboration to make Persis catch the innuendo in the last remark: that morning she had gone off duty leaving a shade down to spare a patient who faced a glare of sunlight.

"The man had a raging headache," she said.

"When patients have such symptoms, here at the General Hospital we are in the habit of reporting the case to the House Surgeon. We have a special preparation of acetanilid compound in the drug room that doctors are more than likely to prescribe for headaches."

She made a solemn pause, and struck out again into the current of her reprimand. "Did it ever occur to you, Miss Litchfield, that if you began your morning work half an hour earlier, you could turn the service over to your successors in perfect order?"

"I begin at 4:30 A. M. as it is. It seems inhuman to wake sick people any earlier than that. They do enjoy their morning naps so much more than having their faces washed and their hair combed. I'd gladly stay an extra half hour and put things to rights, but the head nurse drives me off at seven o'clock whether I'm through with my work or not!"

"Quite right! She follows out my special directions in such matters. And if you plan to remain here with us you will do the same, Miss Litchfield."

Persis gave a little unconscious squirm of distress. "I see you are looking somewhat frustrated by the sense of your shortcomings. Therefore I will now permit you to retire to your own room, and will in the near future call your attention to the remaining points of your deficiencies, which, I need not add, you must constantly hold up before yourself for betterment. Good afternoon, Miss Litchfield."

With the weight of this ambiguous praise resting on her sensitive spirit, Persis entered upon her advanced duties in the Children's Ward. After a week of daily exhortations and

trying criticisms, the Superintendent of Nurses graduated from the subject of "shortcomings"; Persis began to feel at home in her new quarters and equal to her task. It was not yet ten o'clock of a dull March morning, and she reflected that the ward work so far was going unusually well. The little bed patients were bathed, fed, and medicated up to the hour. The convalescents, with sleek brushed hair or tight pig-tails, and garbed in pink and blue gingham frocks, stood in patient line waiting for the house doctor to make morning rounds. All the high temperatures were neatly charted; the eight o'clock clinic of medical students had tramped on to laboratory periods; and the green probationer seemed to Persis imbued with a special and happy talent for making good-looking beds.

Presently a swoop and a swish of starched piqué rounded the corridor and she stood face to face with the Superintendent of Nurses. "Good morning, Miss Litchfield. In coming along the hall I noticed some minute particles of dust under the extreme further corner of your ice-box in the kitchen. Have you no maid on this floor, Miss Litchfield?"

"Yes; but at present she is finishing sweeping the ward. We are preparing for morning rounds."

"Ah! then kindly request your probationer to provide herself with a cloth well dampened in carbolised water and so remove the dust particles. It will teach her thoroughness in the future." The tones were bland and tolerant, even forbearing: undeniably the Superintendent of Nurses was in her lenient mood.

"And how does the new probationer take to duty? Is she competent to keep the brasses bright?"

"Oh, she seems very promising indeed!"

"Ah! And may I inquire who made the beds along the farther row, Miss Litchfield?"

"The new probationer did. She is very apt at beds."

"Who taught her to make those, Miss Litchfield?

"I did."

"May I inquire if you, after eight months of my careful and diligent instruction, consider these beds of uniform and proper appearance?"

"I do. And the children rest very well in the beds she makes."

"Ah, indeed. May I trouble you to summon your probationer, Miss Litchfield."

Persis stepped to the bathroom and gave the order to the nervous and frightened newcomer, who was engaged bathing a sick and wailing arrival. On the way back to the ward she whispered to her, "Don't mind her—she flew at me in the same way. I like you."

The young women stood before their chief, awaiting her sentence. "Miss Litchfield, you will kindly request your probationer to go along the entire length of the ward, stripping each bed to the mattress as she passes. Then you will in my presence and in the light of my renewed instruction, so demonstrate to her the sovereign art of bed-making that hereafter the foot of each crib shall stand on an exact line, which line shall be one particular and undeviating crack between the floor boards of the Children's Ward."

Regardless of the fact that the house staff were due any minute on morning rounds, Persis, with nervous exactness, joined her probationer in the bed campaign; and the unsightly appearance of the four beds that remained dismantled when the doctors finally arrived, she was obliged to conceal behind screens.

A few days after the bed-making séance the Superintendent of Nurses again visited the Children's Ward. This time her mood promised to melt in approachableness. For in her mighty, be-cuffed arms she carried a pretty new music-box, which she presented to Persis with something like cordiality.

"Miss Litchfield, here is a new toy for the edification of your

charges. I myself consider it altogether too expensive for this class of children. However, the Young Ladies' Auxiliary presented it, thinking the convalescents might enjoy it—it's a costly gift. And I trust you'll all enjoy it." She swept out of the ward with all the austere grace of a dowager-duchess, leaving the music-box on Persis's desk.

With a delight equal to that of the children, Persis started the new toy off on its repertoire. To her disappointment this consisted of "The Blue Danube," "Wacht am Rhein" and "Marching through Georgia." However, music was music to the children of the East Side, and any strain, albeit from jews'-harp or bronchial hurdy-gurdy, was grateful to their not over discriminating ears. And more than one tired baby, weak from pain and barely able to steady his head for a glimpse of the new toy, peeped wonderingly through the iron bars of his crib and then dozed off to sleep.

Of all Persis's little patients the one who hovered over the music-box longest and listened to it most lovingly, was Rosie Chillóc. Rosie was a happy ten-year-old East Sider, who had been born in a little red-tiled, geranium-clad cottage on the foot-hills of of the Erzgebirge in Bohemia. Nine years ago her father, yielding to the gypsy instinct of nomadism, had wandered with his family to New York. He was a born musician, and played his violin persuasively and untiringly on the street corners of the East Side, so making a comfortable living for his wife and two children. Rosie could hardly remember a time when she had not sung and danced to her father's violin on the Bowery; the love of motion and music was as strong in her as her love of life. She had a lithe, shapely little brown body, charming in its immaturity. And when she danced she was more like some tawny elf-child born of tropical suns and soft breezes than a little unfortunate of crowded New York. When her father died, leaving nothing but his violin to support his family of three, Rosie's pretty

young mother "went out" sewing to provide for her children. Left to herself and the care of a baby brother, Rosie had contracted a bad cold that brought her to the Hospital with a well-developed pneumonia. Good care restored her to health rapidly, and her winsomeness and beauty had won a long convalescence for her in the Children's Ward.

One afternoon, in the short lull just before supper was served in the Children's Ward, Persis started the music-box to quiet tired babies and her own nerves. And Rosie, like a little wild thing in its element, tripped out into the middle of the open space on the polished floor, and lifting her scant pink gingham petticoats daintily, began to dance to "Wacht am Rhein," humming the time in her sweet clear soprano. She was like a dragon fly flitting amongst sunny places. She balanced on the tips of her tiny nimble toes with uncommon grace, and moved so airily that she made no more sound than the petals of a rose dropping. She held one tawny little hand against her heart, her short raven curls bobbing up and down on her shoulders, her white teeth glistening through her half-open lips, her black eyes brilliant with unadulterated joy. Already a favourite with the ward children because of her gentle ways, Rosie now, with her newly revealed talents, held them spell-bound.

Just at the precise height of Rosie's pretty feat, the Superintendent of Nurses appeared in the doorway. Persis, whose attention had joined that of the children in undivided appreciation of Rosie, failed to notice the advent of the august personage until a voice of sarcasm and reprimand stung her ears: "May I ask if this is an example of your ward discipline, Miss Litchfield?"

Rosie, happily oblivious to all outside hostility, went twirling noiselessly on down the ward, and the low sweet tones of the music-box were the only response to the Superintendent of Nurses.

"May I ask if you consider such antics as this suitable conduct in a ward full of sick people, more particularly when they represent excitable, impressionable sick children?"

Persis turned to meet her, the instinct for justice and self-defence strong in her. "The only two sick ones are already fed and asleep, as you may observe by glancing at the corner beds," she replied with calmness. "There isn't a temperature in my ward above 99°—my Junior nurse took them all, not half-hour ago."

The Superintendent of Nurses gave a scornful "Ah, indeed," and glared at the flushed and happy Rosie, who had now fallen into "position" beside her own bed.

"When I placed you at the head of the Children's Ward, Miss Litchfield, and presented you with this toy, I hardly had in mind such acrobatic and unseemly pranks as I now behold you sanctioning. Kindly explain your remissness, Miss Litchfield."

"When you gave me the music-box you said you hoped the children would all enjoy it. I fail to see a fuller, more harmless enjoyment than the one you have just witnessed. This is a very trying half hour, ordinarily. You may observe how every child in the ward has been diverted from fretfulness and wailing for its supper."

"Indeed, Miss Litchfield? Hereafter, however, I shall require you to devise some diversion less demoralising than the dance. Have you considered, I wonder, the effect such unseemly indulgences may have on this gypsy child's morals?" And she swept mightily out of the ward and carried her pompous piqué down the dustless corridor.

One afternoon when the March wind singing amongst the water-pipes reminded her of the resonant hilltops about Tinkham, Persis took her place in the long line of uniforms at the luncheon table. But her meal was disturbed by an envelope boldly proclaiming her name from the mantel-shelf, the local

post-office, in masculine address obviously not Jerry's. With a not too conspicuous haste when so many eager eyes were on guard, she made a scanty luncheon of mutton-stew, claimed her letter as she passed out by the mantel-shelf, and hurried to her own room for the privacy of perusal. The note was from Calvin Darrach saying that Mrs. Darrach and he were in New York and that as Mrs. Darrach felt too indisposed with a slight headache to write, he wished to remind her that if perfectly convenient for her they would deem it unusual pleasure to visit her hospital to-morrow afternoon and take her to dine somewhere and hear "Faust" with them.

She began the tour of the hospital in the operating amphitheatre on the top floor and rather systematically, remembering that one of her guests was seeking suggestions for such a building. Repeatedly Nellie threatened prostration; but her husband kept on his way, peering into corners of sanitation and compactness. At last they arrived on the first floor and Nellie, burying her face in her chinchilla muff, cried plaintively, "Oh, Calvin, how depressing! Did you see that man in an invalid chair with his head all battered and swathed in bandages? And just look—no, don't look—at that empty sleeve! Are you really sane when you say you *like* to live amongst such miserable creatures, Persis? Oh, I know it will make me ill if I stay here much longer! Do hurry, Calvin! After a peep at the Children's Ward I want to go." And she hurried her husband and hostess along through the surgical wards, with an air of shrinking and revulsive detachment. If Calvin Darrach was looking for points and helps, as his note book in hand testified, his wife gave him small opportunity for any on surgical construction, except the most superficial. She kept hinting at sundry and desirable articles in the shops that she wished to purchase, and drifted through the vortex of New York City's benevolence and misery with a light and supercilious mien, constantly protesting that the sight of

suffering made her nervous. Arrived at the Children's Ward, which Persis in her pride of ownership had reserved as a climax, Nellie paused in the doorway and glaced down the room. "Oh! What a skeleton of a child that is over in the corner bed! Is it a boy or a girl? Are all East Side children as pale and unattractive as that one?"

"He has been deathly sick for ten days," Persis defended. "This is the first day he has cared to sit up in his crib. I had him adorned with that blue sacque and put up in a sitting posture as a special celebration in your honour," she added, with one of her choicest smiles.

"Oh, how sweet of you, dear," Nellie vouchsafed. "And what ails the wan little girl with all that machinery about her? She looks as if she were screwed down in a vice." And Nellie rustled her silken shoulders gracefully.

"That's Tina Malchowsky. She has been operated on for hip-joint disease."

Nellie took another sweeping and sufficient survey of the ward, and turned back. "It's too depressing," she announced. "I think, if you and Calvin will excuse me, I'll sit here in the hall where I can't see the children. I begin to feel faint."

Calvin, ignoring this ominous climax of his wife's sensations, went on down the ward, observing and petting the little occupants of each crib as he passed. Meanwhile Persis placed a chair out in the corridor for Nellie, saying, "I think you'll enjoy meeting my friend, Rosie Chillóc. Rosie especially likes to meet strangers. She will entertain you charmingly with East Side stories."

Rosie, with wide-eyed, unreserved appreciation of Nellie's rich apparel and the unconscious ease of childhood, took her beautiful lady by the hand confidingly, bending down to lay her tawny little face in the long luxuriant ends of Nellie's chinchilla stole, and as a preliminary to friendliness, immediately inquired if the lady had any little girls at home. To

avoid participation in this somewhat personal approach to first intercourse, Persis returned to her guest in the ward.

As Calvin passed Tina's bed, he gave an audible groan, and paused to lay his long nervous fingers gently on the child's claw-like hand. "Would you like a splendid new picture-book," he asked enticingly, "one with big letters in it telling all about beautiful Princesses with golden hair and blue velvet gowns, that brave Princes in red satin coats carry off on big white horses way off up to great stone castles on high, woody hills?"

Only half understanding his words, but fully conscious that they meant something nice, Tina gazed up at him, her great, luminous eyes aglow with eagerness. "Please, yes," she lisped.

"Very well. That's a new game you and I are going to play to-morrow. Don't forget, now! You ask Miss Litchfield for it—the first mail. Good-by!" And he stooped to stroke the sunny hair of a little German lass who sat coddling an old rag doll in a tiny rocking chair, so dear to the hearts of ward children. "She seems well. Look at her pink cheeks," he said to Persis.

"Ah, but the poor rest of her—when she tries to walk! Paralysis—both legs."

He shut his eyes involuntarily a moment, and frowned darkly, as if in protest that such things must be. "Has she anybody to take care of her, when she leaves here?"

"Both her parents are living. Her father is a cripple; he cobbles shoes when he can find customers. Her mother takes in washings to support the family. There are two grandparents and seven other children beside Tina. Yesterday the mother came to visit the child. She told me that she often fed the family of eleven on two dollars and eighty cents a week."

"Good God!" Calvin muttered, and passed on.

The little fellow in the corner bed, whom Nellie had found

"unattractive and pale," had never taken his large blue eyes off Calvin's huge presence for a moment of the visit. When Calvin neared his corner, the child put out his thin, weak arms in silent appeal to be taken up.

"Bless the little chap—all eyes and wistfulness! Will it do something awful to him if I take him?"

"No. He loves to be held. I often rock him—it rests him so. He's had such a siege of the crib!"

Calvin, with the tenderness and dexterity of a woman, took the tiny frailty in his great arms. The babe gave a sigh of well-content and nestled down into the cosey curve of Calvin's shoulder. He bent his head to one side over it lovingly, encircling its pulsating little body with his fine, firm fingers in a slow, soothing rhythm of pats, and held the babe so during the rest of his round through the ward. Presently his wife appeared in the door to inquire if he was almost ready to go. He replied that he was, and paced back to the corner crib with his little friend.

As he laid the babe down, arranging him in an easy position, Persis recalled Sallie's vivid picture of Calvin Darrach and his love of children. It struck her as very odd that Sallie should have composed the drama of his childlessness and that she herself had seen its enactment. And again the disparity and the pathos of human mischances and combinations cut down into her deeper consciousness with sharp effectualness. She was startled out of her ruminations by Calvin Darrach's voice asking, "Whose is he? Tell me about him."

"He's nobody's child. He's a foundling. Miss Boggs, who was on night duty, one bitter, windy night last month heard an unusual cry as she passed the outside door in the corridor off the Children's Ward. She opened the door, and found this babe on the top step. He was well muffled, but suffering much from the shock of cold and lack of food. We nurses fought like Trojans for his life—he was such a winsome,

splendid little chap, you see. And now the Doctor expects a rapid convalescence—he has such a beautiful physique to build on."

Calvin stood a moment, bending over the crib; the muscles of his face were drawn in thought and feeling that might have expressed speculation as to the past and future of the foundling, or might have denoted his own unsatisfied yearning, Persis thought. It was not easy to read precise meanings into the shades of varying perceptions that chased each other over Calvin Darrach's face. He was the type of business man who rarely made aggressive and positive statements about the subject in hand. He was far more likely to ask for information than he was to offer it. He nearly always approached every stranger with some simple question, as if he would start him off on some topic from which he would draw inferences and wisdom for his own purposes—if he valued the discourse. But this is not saying that he could not express very decided and sagacious opinions, when the proper occasion arose. So now, face to face with the little foundling, he said nothing, but he muttered a savage something under his breath that sounded to Persis strangely like an oath. Then he waved a good-by to the foundling, and turned to join his wife in the corridor.

The next morning Persis returned to her work with renewed courage and zeal. The music and the theme of "Faust" had re-charged her at a time when routine had depleted her. The last time she had heard the opera was with Jerry; so last night she had been able again to weave her own memories and fancies into her enjoyment of the grandeur and power of the love-music. And the effort and the association had brought her balance and refreshment.

"Good morning, Miss Litchfield. If you are not too busy to help me, I'd like to take down Tina's dressing."

Persis turned to find Dr. Chamberlain addressing her. "In half an hour," he explained, "the visiting staff will be upon us.

We can save time and nerves if I get that plaster bandage off for them."

She began with dexterous hands to prepare the accessories around Tina's bed. The poor child, in instinctive fear of the grim procedure ahead of her, began to set up a low, grievous wail. "Don't cry, Tina," Persis urged gently. "Remember the picture book of the beautiful Princesses and the Castle on the Hill. The kind gentleman sent the book to Tina. If she is a brave girl she shall have it—the minute the doctors go."

Dr. Chamberlain laboured awhile, hewing off the plaster that incased the poor twisted thigh. Then with non-hospital irrelevancy, he inquired, "Did your friend enjoy the children yesterday, Miss Litchfield?"

She looked up in surprise. "How did you know I had guests?"

"I came to the ward to speak with you and saw your friend paying tribute to the foundling."

"Oh! yes, indeed. Mr. Darrach fully appreciated the found one," she agreed. "He is very much interested in hospitals, because he is going to build one."

"Ah!" And Dr. Chamberlain gave her a swift comprehensive glance and renewed his attack on the plaster dressing with unnecessary concentration.

"His wife did not enjoy the ward much. The suggestion of suffering makes her ill," Persis went on.

"His wife? Was the lady on intimate terms with Rosie out in the corridor, his wife?"

"Yes. She preferred to wait outside while her husband played with the children."

Dr. Chamberlain paused with his scissors in hand.

"I came to the ward yesterday afternoon to tell you, Miss Litchfield, that to-morrow night Miss Adams gives her two-hundredth performance of 'Little Minister.' There will be souvenirs, of course, and exceptionally good acting. I have

tickets, and it would double my pleasure if you will go with me."

It would be good to see some version of a minister—she had not had a glimpse of the busy Jerry in over a month. Jerry had told her not to cut herself off from other friends. So she went off duty and instead of taking a walk, wrote a letter to Jerry, telling him that she was going to see "The Little Minister" with the house surgeon, and that the diversion would be a puny substitute for a girl who longed with all her heart to see her own minister, albeit he was far from small.

CHAPTER VIII

ONE day the last of May, Persis found herself in her own room wondering whether she should write to Jerry, take a walk, or read "Alice in Wonderland." When she was reduced to the verge of bodily weariness and mental lassitude, it always refreshed her to follow Alice through the maze of her bewilderment. To-day she turned instinctively to the place where Alice swam off in the salt sea of her own tears; and thus diverted with her own sympathetic understanding of the situation, she heard no sound in her exalted regions until the door burst open and Sallie Howe stood beside her.

"Of all luck—and I expected to wait here in this miserable attic hours till you came off duty! Just look at me—gaze on my scraggly hair—behold the jag on my hat! Would you hesitate to call me 'a perfect sight'?"

Sallie certainly represented an extraordinary and fantastic spectacle. Her habitually neat appearance was dishevelled to the point of comic rowdiness, a caricature of her usual immaculate self. Her smart Milan straw travelling hat was tilted ridiculously down over her small upturned nose, and at the same time rested well over one ear, at a preposterous angle totally out of line with its intended severe shape. Her tan chiffon veil dangled now on, now off the brim of her hat, and lay coiled around her neck in dejected limpness. Wisps of her straight hair in wayward tentacles straggled about her flushed face.

"Well, I'm glad of any chance to recover my fleeting breath —likewise my new hat! Twice was I on the brink of the humiliatiting alternative of appearing before you quite hatless, or else parting with twenty-two of my hard-earned ducats for another." She turned to the scanty mottled mirror and began

to hunt for hat pins that simultaneously vanished into the concealment of chiffon recesses.

"I'm immeasurably glad to see you, Sallie dear! Pardon—if I don't get up. That mirror you won't find consoling to your looks, though! Before it has a chance to corrugate your nose, draw up my one festive rocker near me and tell me what you *have* been chasing!"

Nothing loath, Sallie dropped into the chair and with a sigh of regret and defeat began.

"Well I tried my best most to catch it, anyway! Angels and all long-skirted, ultra-shod females can do no more."

"Catch what?"

"Why the Seaboard Limited, of course!—private coach and all the rest of pomp!" Sallie offered this enlightenment with a little touch of petulance, as if Persis should have known beforehand, without being told.

"And why this prodigious haste and fruitless pursuit? You mystify me so!"

"Oh, it's the mixiest, most vexatious affair! I should have gotten the telegram last night and so had plenty of time. But the blockhead operator never telephoned me my message till I was eating breakfast! And so ever since I've been nearly dislocating my bones and coagulating my cerebral circulation trying to catch that villainous train! I need not disparage your acute imaginative faculties by adding that I arrived at Jersey City just in time to see the tail end of the Limited vanishing gracefully and noiselessly down the glistening track. I did have the high gratification, though, of beholding Numarch —that's Jim's man—arranging countless bags and pillows, and I caught a glimpse of a trained nurse's uniform just as the car disappeared. It was all too exasperating." And Sallie indulged in a gesture of mild impatience.

"Jim—pillows—trained nurses! What picture of distress is working in your mind now, Sallie?"

"That's the word—distress! Thank you! Jim has been so distressed! Oh, it was awful, Persis! It might have killed him, too, just as easily as not." And Sallie leaned her face in her hands miserably.

"You poor child—I'm so sorry! Do tell me all about it!"

"There now—Jim knew you'd be sorry! That's one of the first things he said when he came out of his ether. 'Persis will be so sorry,' said he."

"You see," Sallie continued, "Jim always has been so reckless on horseback. He doesn't know what physical fear is! He's ridden since he was old enough to hold a bridle, and he really *is* a very expert and splendid horseman."

"How did it all happen?" Persis asked, breathless with Sallie's drawn-out suspense.

"Why, his uncle, out West, you know, has been deathly ill. Jim is his namesake and favourite, and heir to another cool million. So, when he sent for Jim to come out and sit by his bedside, Jim naturally had to go. This happened just after Thanksgiving, when you'll remember I told you Jim was going to be in New York all winter and take us to the opera."

"Yes, go on!"

"Well, he's had to stay all winter out West with this bothersome old uncle. I never knew a man who has so many tiresome relatives as Jim has! Gradually the task of bedside-sitting became a bore to Jim with his wild temperament. As a mild diversion he started in to train a young broncho. His uncle owns droves of horses and acres of ranchland, you know. Jim was helping at a round-up of cattle on the prairies one day. He was riding this wild, half-broken, vicious little beast. The herd stampeded and Jim dashed off in hot pursuit of them. He rode his broncho into a ditch, overgrown with prairie grass, and broke both the little brute's front legs. Of course the broncho had to be shot then and there. But before Jim got

free from the stirrups the animal gave him a vicious kick in the side that nearly did for him."

"How awful! And so unnecessary, too!"

"Yes, wasn't it? But Jim never will keep out of such scrapes —it's his nature to want to be in everything going. Of course, there wasn't good surgical care on the ranch, and Jim had to be taken to a hospital in the nearest city; but the doctors there bungled his case. By the time they got him to New York he had to be operated on all over again. I needn't tell you that he shuffled off about half his mortal coil. He's been up at the Presbyterian Hospital for about a month now. This morning he was well enough to be transferred to a special car and taken South to convalesce. He sent for me last night to come in and see him off, but some demon of mischance did me out of it."

Sallie looked anxious and disappointed. "I don't know what Jim will think of me—he's so sensitive! He's half sick yet, and probably hurt and vexed that I failed him. He's awfully hard and unforgiving, too. Probably he'll never speak to me again!"

"Not so bad as that, surely, Sallie. But why in the world didn't you tell me that Jim was sick right here within a stone's throw of us? Jerry would have called and cheered him along. And I should have sent him some violets."

"Ah, you don't understand Jim, yet! He wouldn't let me send for you, although all the time he wanted you to come see him. He's very proud and childish. He had the silliest notion that you'd scorn him for his bungling horsemanship. He insisted I should not tell you about his accident till he was most well. The doctors say he'll soon be that now. He's gone to recuperate in the North Carolina mountains. He has a little hunting lodge there and says he'll pick up fast. He has taken a perfect retinue of servants along, his doctor and his man, and two trained nurses."

"I'm glad he's gone to the mountains," Persis added. "When will he return?"

"Oh, in about a month. He left a good-by for you—'for Persis'—as he always calls you. He says that is his favourite name for a woman! And he wanted me to tell you that as soon as the doctor would let him, he should write you a long letter."

"That is good. I'll be glad to get it."

Sallie consulted her gold fob and its attachment of watch. Then she looked around the room critically. "I don't see any of your beautifiers up yet. Can't you find time to cover up some of this vacuum?"

"Yes, but I have a reason for not. Somehow I always did regard my own personal treasures too sacred to be polluted by common eyes. I suppose it's my secluded nature to feel so. I prefer to enjoy my belongings in spirit, down in the unmolested bottom of my trunk, rather than to lay them out for inspection."

"Talk about mystification—what do *you* mean?"

"My dear Sallie, there is the strangest system of espionage here in this Training School—I suppose we're no worse off than all nurses, though. But at frequent and unexpected intervals there is a committee of highly respectable ladies who descend upon the privacy of our rooms and overhaul them. Bureau drawers, closets—nothing is sacred to them! You can't fancy how this irritates my secretive soul, Sallie."

"If I ever heard of such ill-manners! Do you mean that they actually ransack the nurses' rooms?"

"My dear Sallie, 'ransack' is an ugly word. People here say 'inspect.' It's all part of institutional life, you know. There is a tradition afloat in our Training School that these ladies inspect our private domains in order to instil the habit of hospital neatness into the very sources of our beings. Of course, they do a lot of 'inspecting' in the wards. They go

around peeking and squinting for cobwebs in the farthest corners of linen closets and supply rooms—it never seems to occur to them to discover whether or not we have the right idea about our duty to our patients! There's one bespectacled spinster who almost gets apoplexy peering and sniffing around in my ice-box! Some day I know nothing will ever keep me from giving her a good end push and locking her in! Of course, though, it's all fair for them to roam around the wards, but when it comes to the nurses' own rooms—I've been here long enough now to know that it is only a contemptible cog in the great Hospital Machine. Sallie," she went on very earnestly, "if I ever break down and lose my health at the General Hospital, it will not be hard work, continuous, hard work that finishes me. It will be because I succumb to the crushing weight of the Hospital Machine."

"How you worry me, talking so about breaking down, Persis! But these hateful women prowling about your rooms on the quiet—I suppose there isn't one of them that doesn't convince herself she is thereby fulfilling her high and bounden duty to the Training School Board?"

"Exactly! And the strangest part of it all is that they are ladies of preëminent breeding, who would glance blushingly to one side rather than watch you mount the steps to climb into the top berth of a sleeper."

"Or who would shudder with sympathy for your bruised feelings, if you were unfortunate enough to drop your soup-spoon at a dinner!"

"There is another reason why I prefer to keep my room vacant," Persis went on. "I truly do like to make as little trouble for my fellow beings as possible. If I have nothing much in my room to inspect, I shall thereby assist the revered committee ladies by making their task in my quarters very light."

"You whimsical child! How I'd love to take you home with

me, away from all these hateful surroundings! I must be off now to catch the noon train—so father won't have to lunch alone. When will you spend a half-day with us in the country? You'd love the garden now. And the colts are pining to take you for a canter over the mountain! They told me so the last time I visited the stable," Sallie added with naïve charm.

"I'll come out next week. Sometimes, Sallie, I just yearn for my freedom again! It takes all my nerve and will power to tread this mill here. I want Jerry and I want life."

Sallie bent over her tenderly. "Be a brave child," she urged. "Think—you're nearly half through your course already! The last lap is always the exciting one. We're so proud of you, dear, Jerry and I! He told me so in his last letter. And think what a wise one and what a blessing you'll be all the rest of your life, with all this knowledge in you." She stood up to readjust her veil with deft fingers. As she reached the door she turned back to say, pointedly, "I almost forgot the best of all! Jim played it over and over again for me—how you looked—what you did—how you appealed to him. Oh, he is almost in love with you now! Every time I went to see him while he was ill he spent the whole hour telling me about you. I was quite jealous—at times I felt postively *de trop!*"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Last month Jim had to make a flying business trip to New York for his uncle. This was just before his accident. He went to the theatre the first night he was in town, and saw you and Jerry there—'Little Minister,' I think he said the play was."

Extreme merriment passed over Persis's face as she took this lucky venture. Sallie went on. "Jim sat in the right hand box and you and Jerry were just below him in orchestra chairs. He had a grand view of you both, and evidently never took his eyes off you all the evening. He liked Jerry, too—thought him a thoroughbred, very stunning—a typical Harvard man.

He remembered him well, too—had met him at a Hasty Pudding Club dinner. He described your every gesture, your clothes, your appreciation of Miss Adams, your pleasure in Jerry. And he raved and swore by your beauty—says if he ever meets a woman like you he will marry her."

Persis jumped up from her couch, alight with the fun of adventure. "That's where I have you both! The joke is decidedly on you and Jim this time!"

Sallie started. "Why indeed?" she asked sharply.

"Because I wasn't with Jerry at all! I was with Dr. Chamberlain. And apparently Jim's memory of Harvard men is as wild as his horsemanship."

Sallie looked discomfited and *gauche*. "Leastways," she maintained, "Jim saw you at the theatre! I don't suppose that with his prodigious appreciation of beautiful women he wasted much time watching your masculine escort." With renewed appeal for a visit she bade Persis an affectionate good-by. "Don't stir," she commanded. "Lie down and rest while you may! *Au revoir*—till Tuesday."

Toward the last of the week Persis received a letter from some unfamiliar hand, postmarked, "Asheville, North Carolina." She tore it open with some agitation, and read:

"My Dear Miss Litchfield:

"This will be a rambling, moody sort of a letter—a good deal like the chap who writes it. But when a fellow as fond of action and liberty as I am has a hole punched in his side, and is chained to a mass of pillows by a tyrannical eagle-eyed doctor and two ubiquitous trained nurses, he has to amuse himself somehow. And that's why I'm writing to you, dear. By the way, the trained nurse part of my oppression isn't so bad. This one only palls on me when I compare her with you. In fact, I spend lots of dull old hours planning what we'd talk about if you were taking care of me. But—that's another thing I'm forced to label "Too late." Perhaps Sallie has told you that I've gone into quarters in a little hunting lodge of mine down here amongst the Carolina mountains. It's an immoderately lonely spot, but wild and beautiful—a good place for a

reckless fellow like me to rest in, they say. I put in some spare time planning what we'd do if you and 'Jerry' and Sallie were all to come down here and pay me a visit! We'd have good fun—eh? We'd ride horseback over the mountain trails—we'd hunt and fish. Nights we'd have a big log fire made in the cabin and tell stories to each other—we'd regularly 'keep house.' You must please save me a month some time in the not too distant future for just such a visit. Nothing could give me more happiness than to entertain you and your Jerry. And usually the things that give me most pleasure are the things I set out for in this life. My doctor says I must ring off now—that writing is too excitable work for me—confound him! Pardon that, please, and show me that you pity my weary days by writing me a nice letter. Remember that it is only a part of your life now to be kind to those down on their luck. And that's just what I am—else I should be in New York giving you and Sallie a good time. But 'cheer up'—the worst is yet to come!

"Until we meet and always,

"Yours faithfully,

"Jim Kimberley.

"Crow-keep Lodge,
"Asheville, North Carolina."

CHAPTER IX

THEY had run away for a little whiff of sea-air down at the Battery. "Only a year now, belovedest—only a year—and Jerry has his girl with him for always!"

Moreover, he was on the lookout for the first good opportunity that came his way, offering a home for them both. So she returned for the last lap in her hospital course, reassured and consoled. She missed Sallie immeasurably; it was unreasonable to miss anyone so much, when she really saw just as much of Sallie in Boston suburb as of Sallie in New Jersey. Sallie had gone on to Boston to renew her visit with the Kimberleys. Of Jim Kimberley she, as yet, had seen nothing. After his convalescence at the hunting lodge in the North Carolina mountains, his physician had ordered him to Europe for the benefit of the sea-voyage. "Nothing loath, with the prospect of renewing his wicked revels and haunts in Paris," Sallie had written, he had "run over" for a few months. But the fascinations and variety of Continental life after so long an unwonted illness, had kept him in Europe for over a year. But a jubilant note from Sallie last week had announced his advent, and a long description of flirtations, séances, blissful situations, exciting escapades, and his renewed desire to meet the "incomparable one." It was very odd, Persis told herself, that always at the precise moment Sallie had arranged most carefully for Jim Kimberley to meet her, chance should step in and side-track them. She reviewed the past three years, and recalled the climax of as many as four of these skilfully laid plots for meeting, and that each had ended in disappointment and some sudden disaster. And now, after concealing himself for over a year in Europe, he had returned again, with his

old plea to be allowed to "meet Persis!" Was this the way a "man of the world," as Sallie had always been so careful to term Jim Kimberley, behaved toward a woman he so ardently desired to know? She would have thought that it would have been so much more like such a man to have stepped up boldly some time and speak to her. But then, she knew so little about men, anyway—almost nothing, except about Jerry. Him, she flattered herself, she knew thoroughly.

She was busy in the operating room sterilising dressings and preparing for several major operations the next morning. Presently a firm, light step approached, and she told herself that Dr. Chamberlain was coming to give her special directions for the operative cases.

He paused just in front of her and wrinkled his eyebrows into a central frown that shook off his glasses, which he caught by dexterity of long habit on his left thumb, his right hand being thrust down deep in the pocket of his white duck trousers.

"Would you be offended, Miss Litchfield, if I asked you a very personal question?"

She stood with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, reeling off spools of silk sutures and swathed in her operating gown, the whiteness of which had long since deepened into a cream colour through a series of sterilisations, the coarseness and roughness of the unironed linen in marked contrast against the fineness of her classic, beautiful arms.

She smiled at the discretion of his approach. "Beyond any doubt, no! What particular phase of my conduct puts you on such guarded ground?"

"Your entire being and attitude," he replied unhesitatingly.

"Ah, that's comprehensive—sweeping, one might call it."

She started and felt a nervous quiver go through her. She had hardly expected this turn in the conversation when she permitted him personalities.

"To go back to that question, Miss Litchfield—would you

mind telling me quite frankly why you are here in this work?"

She felt immeasurably relieved—that she could handle the situation again. She met him with complete sweetness and truth. "Not at all—I've always been frank with you. That's the beautiful part of our two years' work here together, and why we understand so well. I am here in training to fit myself in the largest possible way for a life of work amongst the poor and needy."

"Ah, something has kept telling me so! And I, too, am here for the same reason." It was the first time he had ever openly acknowledged the large plan of his life.

He bent his earnest, steadfast eyes on the polished tile of the immaculate floor, put his glasses in their case, and thrust both hands down in the depths of his pockets. He took a circular turn or two around the amphitheatre: and then pausing beside her, he said, his voice very tender and full of emotion, "Miss Litchfield, would you do me the supreme honour of sharing this life of work amongst the needy with me?"

She felt herself reel slightly. Their friendship had been so perfect, she told herself bitterly! So unsophisticated was she that she did not know how well-nigh impossible youth finds it to maintain a level of friendship between a man and a girl exposed to the touchstone of daily fellowship in a work that engrosses them both. Being mated herself, she was freed from the persecution of the mating instinct, and had to learn that youthful friendships between the sexes never stand still, but either progress into love, or degenerate into indifference. In other words she did not know the hopelessness of Platonic friendship, and cried out to discard the man as a lover, while wishing to keep him as a friend. She turned to him, letting the spool of sterile suture drop unheeded to the floor; and with all the tenderness of a fine pained sensibility, said, "Forgive me—I never meant to hurt you—I did not understand! Always,

since my early childhood—I have been plighted to a man —a young minister. And 'twas to help him in his work—to help myself pass the three dreary years without him—that I came here."

She felt the man beside her recoil, and then with a mighty physical effort that seemed the reflex of his inner shock, recover himself in tense and breathless immobility. He stood thus still and rigid, so long that in her state of painful confusion and self-abasement, she found herself wondering if he would never stir again, or stand so always there in the amphitheatre of the marble operating room, a perpetual monument to her own defenceless and stupid conduct? But he was able to meet her eyes bravely, quietly. He must have read aright the light in them, the remorse and self-blame that besought him to make this his final judgment of her generous. For he answered her look with surpassing gentleness, saying, "It isn't your fault, dear—don't look so grieved! I should have known—I was blind not to understand! Ah, it's all daylight clear to me now! Work like yours was never done except by love and for love. Let me wish you every happiness—and a long joy."

He held out his firm, supple hand to her, the strong, gentle, well-kept hand of the born surgeon. And as she took it, another consciousness came to her that again the two years of hospital machinery and toil had been worth the while, since they had given her the perfection of her ideal of a doctor.

. . . . . .

This day's distractions ended at last, Persis went to her own room. Next day Jerry was to leave on his vacation, was going fishing with a classmate up in the Parmachene Lake region somewhere. A sudden, uncontrollable desire to see him again before he went so far seized her. She recalled with deep gratitude that he had always urged her to send for him if ever she needed him. In all the past two years she had not felt this

need as she did now. She longed to tell him about Dr. Chamberlain and to hear him say it had not been her fault. She knew that he did not leave the Grand Central till 4 o'clock of the next afternoon; she wrote a hurried note telling him she needed him so much—so much—begging him to meet her to-morrow noon in the Nurses' Parlour. For years, she had never allowed herself to be without a special delivery stamp; tip-toeing down five flights of stairs, dingily shadowed by a second floor, far gas-jet that gave almost as much light as a white bean, she hurried along the side street to post her letter at the nearest sub-station down the avenue that reeked with noisome heat odours, oppressive turmoil, and shrill, inhuman sounds. Once she had to pass a corner saloon, and just as she was going by, a crowd of loafers issued from behind the swinging, mirrored doorway; and one of them made besotted, complimentary remarks about her uniform. It was not until the comparative quiet of past midnight (for the East Side never quite loses consciousness in sleep) that she could compose herself enough to rest.

The next morning, beside the nervous tension of assisting at five major operations, she was made additionally uneasy by the thought that she must not keep Jerry waiting. Stopping on the way to get her mail, she was surprised to find a special delivery from him. Could it be that he had failed her and was sending a note instead of himself?

"7 A. M.

"GIRL OF MINE,

"Am so glad to have your special close beside me here, and am heart-broken with regret that I actually can't get off to meet you this noon —so many last hurried multiple things remain to hedge me in! I spent most of last night thinking about you, and there is just one thing you must always remember, belovedest, and that is that Jerry loves you. Yes, I love you—and always will love you—no matter what comes. Needless to say that I shall think of you each hour of my vacation, cursing every circumstance and thing that makes a barrier between us. At times

I shall paint on the background of my imagination and heart the little home scenes of when we'll be together—our growth, usefulness and intense happiness. Never pain, darling! But of course I know that whatever we have it will be extreme and heartrending—for that is the way we are made, *n' est-ce pas?* Last night between my heart throbs of you and the litter of packing, my mind wove a scrappy pattern from the patches and ravellings of our past two years. Triumph and struggle, victory and defeat, hope and despair—all jumbled up together in a tangle of nondescript weave! At times I find it difficult to throw my shuttle—or know just where I'm at. And sometimes I think I'm nothing but a big mistake.

"Meanwhile, again God bless you! I pray that your last month goes smoothly, and that at Sallie's you may get all rested once more—for me. I shall write next from Parmachene Lake.

"Devotedly and eternally,
"Your JERRY."

It was plain enough to her now, she said, as she folded the note and crushed it into the front of her uniform, that she must pick up the drag-net of her last, irksome hospital duties and draw it alone. Jerry was too busy to help her. She remembered that simultaneously with Sallie and Jerry, Dr. Chamberlain had forsaken her, too. Where once their work had seemed to bring them constantly together, it now appeared to throw them apart. She wondered how a man who had formed the background of all her work for two years could thus so effectually vanish from sight and contact? Especially she wondered that if, for two years, he had tried as assiduously to find her, as he now seemed determined to avoid her? She had heard some of the nurses gossiping about his absence, and had understood that he had been transferred to the medical side of the hospital service. She asked herself if he was going to be so unkind as to let her graduate without coming to say good-by?

The week did drag past. And toward the very end of it she stood in the marble amphitheatre of the operating room, arranging the last intricate detail and nicety of closets and

surgical supplies; she was determined that her successor find absolute order. In her preoccupation she did not notice Miss Boggs until a plump hand was laid appreciably on her shoulder.

"I hoped I'd find you up here! While the Superintendent is wigging the new head of the Children's Ward, I ran away to say good-by," she explained, between panting breaths. It was very evident that she had not risked discovery by ascending in the cumbersome and noisy elevator. She stopped talking and plastered her left chest with a podgy hand to quiet her heart, which had been forced to a bothersome state of palpitation by the arduous labour of propelling Miss Boggs's bulk up four flights of stairs.

Persis smiled a welcome. For two years this big-hearted, heavy-handed girl had befriended and shadowed her with unfailing, if at times tiresome, solicitude. "You're off duty for good and true, ain't you?" she asked admiringly.

"Now if I hadn't had that turn of appendicitis due to my over-eating that day I went for supper to the Martin, and all these weeks to make up, I'd be out, too! How I envy you!"

"Don't do that," Persis begged, recalling with a pang that barring the fateful and lamented "turn," Miss Boggs had steered her course through the Training School honourably and valiantly, without hurting anybody—much less the nicest doctor on the staff.

"Remember that day when you were a green probationer and helped me roll bandages? When you didn't even know what an auscultation cloth was and couldn't tell Dr. Chamberlain from the rest of 'em?" Her fat cheeks shook with reminiscent merriment. "I guess you could pick him out from the rest of 'em now," she added, slyly. "Folks say he's awful fond of you. You're the only one of all the nurses he's ever paid a speck of attention to, outside of ward orders." She eyed Persis sententiously through her inflated half-shut lids, with a pause inviting to confidences. But Persis only peered more

critically into the corners of the linen closet, and Miss Boggs resumed her hasty adieux.

"As a class we're awful proud of you," she said, with fond school spirit. "I shall always be so interested to watch what becomes of you when you leave here! Where do you go, anyway? Mercy!—there's the elevator! Somebody's always sure to catch me whenever I get out of line! Good-by, and don't think of leaving the Training School till you've seen my appendix! I've got it, safe in a little bottle of alcohol! It's a perfect beauty, too!" And she planted a resounding kiss on both of Persis's cheeks, scuttling clumsily down the stairs just in time to avoid encounter with the arrival on the elevator.

Persis turned to greet Dr. Chamberlain, and a constrained embarrassment so pervaded her, that she feared what she might do or say. The situation demanded mastery of emotion, and she felt the total lack of any such mastery in herself. But he saved her from revealing or torturing her feelings unduly by saying in the most natural of voices, "Miss Litchfield, to-morrow you leave us. To-morrow I have work outside the hospital. And so I've come to say good-by now." He smiled at her bravely, and held out his hand. "I shall like to think of you resting, with plenty of time to do all the things you love best," he added. "A happy fate to you—and don't utterly forget your East Side friends."

"I could never be as ungrateful as all that," she told him, trying hard to swallow something in her throat. "And you? Surely your long service is nearly ended, too?"

"Yes, I've likewise been found worthy to pass on. Only in my case freedom means merely a change of masters."

She looked at him, interrogatively. Could he feel the need of any fuller hospital training before he started his work amongst the poor, she wondered? "You have some further preparation in mind?"

"No. But in October I start for India."

"For India?" she echoed. "On a trip—to rest?"

"No. I go to start my life work there."

"For whom?"

"For the Presbyterian Board. I'm going as medical missionary, to work in the plague and famine fields. Do you know how many thousand of India's people died from plague and famine during the past six months? That the missionaries are keeping mere wisps of life in hundreds of children there by dispensing daily from the mission stations nothing but mush-balls, made barely palatable and hardly nutritious by wretched sauces flavoured with native spices? Think of every child's birthright of wholesome cereal and cream! I'm going to build a hospital for the plague patients up in the foothills of the Western Ghats—somewhere. And just as soon as I get my bearings, I shall found more stations where these starving bands of native children can be properly fed—the Deccan plain is teeming with them!"

She stared at him in blankest astonishment. As if trying to justify himself in her eyes, which indeed expressed little of sympathy or approval, he went on: "My father is going to build me a model hospital, and Mother has endowed it. You see it only remains for me to pick out a propitious site and persuade people to come." He paused a moment, looking wistfully at her, hungry for a word of praise, approval, or kindness from her. But all her old prejudices against foreign mission work revived in her and held her lips dumb. Despite her two years of real service, she still had so far to travel on the road to altruism! A sudden impulse—the wild, unreasoning impulse of the woman who, although denying herself to a man, still wishes to domineer his destiny—came over her to forbid him to go, to use the power of his love for her to hold him back from such a foolish step. But instead, she curbed herself and asked hotly, "Why so far? Doesn't the misery of your own

people, the iniquity and anguish of your own city, make as vital an appeal to you?"

He looked her full in the eyes, steadily, pervasively—a long last look, that finally travelled up and down the slender length of her tall willowy body incased in the lavender and white folds of her uniform, knowing it was the only vision of her he must carry on the retina of his heart for all time.

"Perhaps."

"Then why do you go off to waste your splendid powers so wantonly on a field that can be sufficiently well manned by mediocre talent?"

He let his gaze still rest upon her fondly, and the only reply he made to her vehemence was:

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> Our devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow."

So he passed out of her actual life forever, to dwell in the fine thin air of the region Memory, from whence she one day later brought him in her futile passionate efforts to understand and reconcile human doom.

The next day Sallie Howe, promptly followed by an express-man, appeared to help Persis in her leave-taking. And then followed long days of quiet and solitude for her, when she revelled in nothing but the relaxation of sheer physical freedom. Only one circumstance cast a shadow on the peace and ease of these rare September days of Howe hospitality, and this was the state of Sallie's health and mind. An unwonted restlessness consumed her, and at times of smallest provocation, developed into an irritability totally alien to the comfortable, easy-going Sallie. Persis often longed to ask her confidence, but it was not easy for a nature like hers to solicit trust; so she waited for Sallie to come to her.

One bright morning in late November the girls were up in Sallie's room. "I tell you, Persis, something's wrong with me. I'm not myself any more."

Glad of the opening to invite confidence, Persis asked: "What troubles you, dear?"

Sallie squirmed around in the couch pillows, eyed her friend penetratingly, and finally said, "Things aren't going my way! There's some terrible 'Shalt not' set on all my love affairs. It's folly for me to plan, Persis!"

She leaned back wearily. Her face was thin and anxious-looking, and a nervous agitation pervaded her.

"No real love is vain," Persis gravely replied. "If Jim Kimberley loves you and has asked you to marry him, as you've implied two or three times lately, I see no reason why you shouldn't go ahead and plan your wedding. Wouldn't it be beautiful," she added with a gesture of revelation, "if we could be married at the same time?"

Sallie groaned. "You do not understand," she said piteously.

"Then let me understand!"

And Sallie went on. "If you will force me to keep on, I know I couldn't hold Jim Kimberley's love if I did marry him! I haven't the temperament and the beauty and the moods to seduce and enslave his fancy! While I'm right with him I can keep him amused! But when he's out of my sight or when a beautiful or even a clever woman comes along—isk!" and Sallie snapped her fingers high over her head, airily, "I've no more influence over him than I have over the Gulf Stream. Fancy a lifetime of this!"

She shook up the down in a pillow viciously, and sank back into ease. "And yet," she added, "I'm weak enough to want to go ahead and marry him." She gave a pitiful little moan. "Oh, I still have the grace left to despise myself—believe me! You need not look so scornful! I hate my weakness just the way I hate my homely face!"

"What I can't understand is why you allowed yourself to go to New England this summer."

"Do you never crave excitement, even when it depletes and destroys you?" Sallie snapped petulantly.

"Poor child," her friend replied, ignoring her intensity. "How worn out you are by this futile love affair with a heartless, selfish man! let's give up the opera this afternoon! we'll have such a good time, here at home. I sha'n't mind missing 'Lohengrin.'"

"I shall," snapped Sallie. "I couldn't be hired to miss it, any more than I'd miss 'Faust' or Barnum's circus!"

"Don't you think you ought to rest, dear? A little nap this afternoon would do you a world of good."

Sallie leaped off her couch and paced around the room twice. "Persis, at times you and your cautious New Englandisms do get on my nerve so!"

She held up her forefinger impressively. "Always through life, I plan to just go as long as there is anything left to go to, to do, or to see! I'll go till I drop—till I can't see straight! Then when I'm faint from exhaustion will I stop and rest—make a business of it, burrow into repose. For mind you, we're a long time quiet and there are æons of sleep ahead of us." And she snapped her finger and thumb together with a click. She went to her closet and began to excavate it of wearing apparel, tossing across the back of her rocking chair, gown after gown of dainty or elegant design till she unearthed a modish suit of black corduroy. Then, after much muttering and ransacking, she produced an enormously large be-plumed white hat. Sitting down on a low baby chair, a relic of her nursery days, she began to button her new patent leather boots with feverish haste.

"That's what made me go in so furiously this summer," she resumed: "I decided to make the most of Jim while his devotion was at high tide! Ah," and her voice rang with

recklessness, "it was worth it—all the heartache and the shame and the anguish since! The days and the nights we put in," she echoed. One button from off her left shoe went spinning across the Turkey rug. "If I die a humdrum, fagged, toothless old maid, I shall have no real agony! The memory and the bliss of those days and nights will have reconciled, redeemed all else."

Persis sat watching her with primitive amazement. Never before in her varied and long intercourse with Sallie had she seen her so transported and vitalised as now. Were all slow languid women thus transfigured into strange new being when stimulated and played upon by the mighty influence of love and passion, she asked herself?

"There are just two things I want to ask you now, sitting here so placid and beautiful and sure of your Jerry and your future. If ever you hear anybody jeering at Sallie Howe because she never had an opportunity to marry, I want you to vehemently contradict her. And, if ever I should come to the point of such lunacy as to marry Jim Kimberley, I want Jerry to marry us and you to be my matron of honour."

. . . . . .

That night Persis heard a moaning sound coming from Sallie's room. She glided to the bedside, laying her cool hand on Sallie's forehead, frightened to find it so hot. The touch made Sallie startle and peer through the half-light. "Just stay with me—don't leave me," she pleaded between moans. "There's just a little something that for such a long time I've wanted so to tell you about—wanted so much to tell you," she repeated lamentingly.

She sank again into a half-sleep, mumbling indistinct sentences in which her friend caught the words "Jim," "falsehood," and "tried so long." Then the words would fall into incoherence, till she roused out of sleep once more, always with the troubled explanation that there was a little something that

for such a long time she had wanted to tell. Persis, with her trained instincts, reflected that in delirium people oftentimes did tell the truth, the whole truth, and incidentally truth that, in rational moments, they would rather bite their tongues out than disclose. And instantly her sensibilities were alive to the fact that Sallie was trying to tell her some disturbing secret, about which Jim Kimberley was closely and unpleasantly allied. And with the honour of true friendship and the æsthetic delicacy that abhors intrusion on the privacies of other people, she told herself that Sallie must not be permitted to reveal her secret while under the stimulus and unguardedness of delirium. So each time her friend insisted on disclosing the vital "something," she soothed her back to quiet and silence, till the old family doctor arrived early in the morning. He noted the unusual thinness, the anxious, haunted expression about the eyes. "Too much excitement somewhere," he volunteered. "Absolute quiet, nourishing food, rest in bed, and plenty of good cheer. Got any idea what's on her mind?" turning to Persis.

"I think she overtaxed herself while in New England this summer."

"It strikes me a New York girl ought to be able to carry off all the gayety she'd be apt to find in New England," he offered. "Be good to her—she's a nice child. And keep her in bed till I tell you to let her up."

One morning after an hour of moody silence, Persis said, "Dear, it seems to me that Jim Kimberley ought to know about your illness and the part his neglect plays in it. I notice he has neither written to you nor sent you as much as a flower all the while you've been so sick. I feel like protesting!"

Sallie turned away toward the window, her face suffused with red. "You wouldn't, if you understood—Jim doesn't know I'm sick." Her tone was an excuse for him.

"Then I shall write and tell him you are!" Persis exclaimed.

"I shall likewise contrive to mingle with my message my precise conclusions about a man who makes love to a girl all summer, asks her to marry him, and then ignores her totally, when she's sick for love of him."

The effect her words had on Sallie was to sit her bolt upright in her bed. She stared at Persis in pained and frightened surprise. "You will please do nothing of the kind," she said firmly. "If you do, I shall make you regret it! I shall make you wish you had never seen daylight! When I want Jim Kimberley to receive communications from me, I am quite capable of sending them myself."

"Then explain to me his extraordinary and nonchalant conduct. I have a right to know! I love you. And frankly, I'm worried about the effect this man is having on your happiness and your health."

"The reason Jim hasn't been to see me or written is because he isn't in this part of the world. He's out on the middle of the Atlantic Ocean in his yacht *Keewaydin*, bound for Martinique." She spoke with a haughty surety and promptness.

"Most extraordinary!" flashed Persis, her voice vibrant with sarcasm and disbelief. In turn Sallie winced, because it was the first time Persis had ever refused to believe her wholeheartedly. She turned to Persis, raising herself upon one elbow, and looking her squarely in the face, said, "I see you do not believe me any more! Small use, then, for me to waste my breath trying to convince you! But I swear to you," and she held up her right hand impressively, "that Jim Kimberley is on his yacht, *The West Wind*, bound for Martinique with a small party of his men friends. Since the disaster there Jim has been wild and crazy to make scientific calculations and snap shots of the place. That's his newest fad—science! But down in my heart I know he went to avoid me—and that's what makes me sad."

Persis went to her and infolded her in both arms. "You

poor, dear child," she said. "The irony of you're being in love with a man like that—you who give so generously!"

Sallie dropped her head on the shoulder offered her. "Stay with me, Persis—stay with me all winter! Don't leave me to myself till I can put it all behind me," she sobbed. "Just stay with me till Jerry carries you off somewhere! I can't get along without you—I can't give you up!" And she lost her voice in a paroxysm of tears.

CHAPTER X

PLEASE tell Miss Litchfield that if she goes to the bench in the rose-garden at once, she will find somebody waiting for her there who is most eager to see her!" Jerry delivered his orders to Nora with breathless haste.

His early morning advent being quite unexpected, Persis was ill-prepared to greet him with the promptitude that his message suggested, being in the hands of Sallie's shampooer. Sallie was out. Jerry, therefore, had a full twenty minutes' wait alone before the appearance of his bride-elect, during which time he puffed mightily at a strong cigar and paced the gravel walks of the rose-garden with ill-disguised impatience. Persis, free at last to scramble into a fresh white shirt-waist suit, had "coo-hooed" merrily to her lover from between the blinds of a rear chamber window, and had received a gallant salute from him in return. She took time to watch him stride back and forth, restlessly, between the rows of box hedge, his classic head, always well set on his broad shoulders, now held at a proud angle. And she told herself that he had never looked so splendid—or so nervous. Even his eyes were in motion, glancing uneasily here and there; and his hands made nervous gestures with his cigar constantly, or clutched abstractedly at the leaflets as he passed along by the low hedge. This nervousness, she told herself, was to be differentiated from that of a lover's impatience. It was clear to her skilled eye that Jerry was overworked. He had arrived at the brink where his ever alert cerebration, now overtaxed and stimulated by three years of almost uninterrupted brain work, would not permit him to enjoy quiet or repose. A big wave of tenderness for him swept over her as she observed his peacelessness. Jerry needed care

—some one to look out for him and conserve him in all the countless little relations of existence; it wouldn't be long now!

In two weeks Jerry would be graduated from the Theological Seminary, and every detail of their wedding was minutely planned. As she put the last touches on her toilette, these details flashed through her mind with satisfying precision. They were all to go on to New England together, Jerry, Sallie, and she, as soon as ever Jerry was free. And then in the peace of the late June glory of Tinkham mountains and the dear old Connecticut River they were to be married. One of Jerry's favourite professors from the Seminary was coming up from New York to marry them; and there were to be only a few guests (two or three of Jerry's college friends and Sallie), because she and Jerry were orphans both, and faced the world practically kinless. Then for their honeymoon they were to go for a few weeks up in the Green Mountains, and just rest and love each other till Jerry found a parish somewhere.

As she flew down the broad stairway and across the lawn to meet him, he halted stock-still in the gravel path, watching her coming, conscious only that his being suddenly rolled out, simplified, obliterated itself into two great, primeval sensibilities —the sense of his abiding, overwhelming love for this girl of his entire youth, and the sense of her preëminent beauty. She came to him, within a few steps of him, an ecstacy in her smile and a clear world of love-light in her gray eyes. The sunshine dazzled on the whiteness of her gown, and through its thinness faintly outlined the flesh tints of her shoulders and glinted on the copper in her brown hair. She stood so, smiling at him, with no word, but a yielding, a surrender in every fair contour of her perfect being. He held out his arms to her, and when she gave herself into them the rose trees bowed their heads and closed their eyes in benediction.

He seated her at one end of a rose-bound nook, carefully lifting a fold of her gown from the pathway. "And now tell

me why I'm here, cutting my morning's work and shirking my theology so shamefully!" He had begun his pacing back and forth again, and stood exactly in front of her with his demand on his lips, his hands crossed behind him.

"Because you love me!"

"No indeed! Better than that! I don't shirk my work every time I love you, by any odds! Guess again."

"Because you have your eye on a parish!"

"Better than that—guess again!"

"I can't—tell me, at once!"

"Because I have accepted a call to a parish and have been inside of our home! Now will you be good?"

She brought her hands together in a joyous little gesture, something like a noiseless clap.

"Don't do that—unless you want to be hugged right here under this laburnum tree!—and that would rumple your fresh gown! I'm too proud to be tampered with to-day!"

"A parish, really?" she repeated, with full, long emphasis on the last rolling word. "And where?"

"Guess! What's worth having is worth guessing."

"In New England—some little town in the mountains?"

"No indeed," with a touch of scorn.

"Some mission church way out West somewhere?"

He tossed his head with a haughty scowl. "Most emphatically not! I see I shall be forced to enlighten you! Very well, then, take my arm and walk with me while I smoke another cigar and set before you the attractions of the future home of Mrs. Jeremiah H. Wadhams."

"Ought you to smoke so much, dear? Only your fourth to-day? Well, don't make me wait," she pleaded, trying to keep up with his swift pace.

"I won't. You've waited already three years—like a hero and a spirit! In a charming little town up in New York State—not too far from the Palisades, within an hour and a half of the

City, and with six trains going in every day. You see, I thought it would be so nice for you to run down to New York often and meet Sallie for theatres and sprees."

"Darling!" she whispered, touched by his thoughtfulness.

"And the church is granite and new, with a young vine crawling all over it, and a lot of organisation to be done and lots of tact needed to reach the outlying districts."

"Tell me about the home," she said.

"Oh, the home—well, you should see it! I'll wait till I can take you there! It's all stucco and gables and lilac bushes—and just big enough for two. You'll lose your mind over it, dear!"

"It's worth the wait! To be near New York, too! I had visions of a little backwoods place for a start. What did you say the name of the place is?"

"Bentley—New York."

"Bentley?" she echoed. "Why, that's where Calvin and Nellie Darrach live!"

"So 'tis! You'll have some one that you know to play with, then. But don't you let Mrs. Darrach infect you with any of her fancy notions about boarding! I want a wife who can and will and loves to keep house for me."

She smiled at him again. "Mr. Darrach is building a new hospital there, too."

"It's built! It's a stunning structure, too. We get a good view of it across the fields from our piazza. I forgot to tell you that the church and parsonage are on a hill—Piety Hill, in Bentley vernacular."

"Perfect—ideal!" she whispered, rapturously.

"And now I am under the heart-rending necessity of leaving my girl and dashing back to New York. Isn't Sallie coming to even congratulate me?" he asked petulantly.

"She's gone to play tennis with the Hatch girls. I'll give her your love."

"You can't give Sallie what I've already fastened on you."

He bent over her adoringly. "Remember that in just two weeks you'll be my bride," he whispered. "I sha'n't see you again till I come out to take you and Sallie in to the Grand Central. Meanwhile, pray for me! And keep yourself happy and well planning how we'll fix that little house on the hill! *Au revoir*, belovedest!" And he dashed down the avenue to catch his train.

. . . . . .

"Shall we hang this Botticelli 'Spring' between the two south windows or over the fire-place, dear?"

Persis, duster in hand and clad in a long lavender gingham apron, across the bib of which her monogram was embroidered in white linen, paused at the foot of the step-ladder, on the top of which Jerry sat at rest after a morning's arduous labour of settling.

"Over the fire-place, by all means—it's only common humaneness! Those diaphanously and half-clad damsels look as if they needed the warmth and cheer of a chimney corner. They'll catch pneumonia if we leave them over there by those draughty windows."

She smiled, despite her attempt to ignore his irrelevance. "I sha'n't pamper your slurs on art," she said. "Can you really reach that moulding?"

"I could if I knew some nice girl who would reward me for such output of energy."

She pretended to not hear him, stepping back to get perspective on the beautiful "Spring" in soft sepia tints and a copper-coloured frame. "That's lovely," she announced, half squinting her eyes to a critical focus. "Don't touch it! It hangs well, just as it is. The south light on it brings out the exact contrast I've been struggling for—the richness of the copper tints against that warm gray wall paper! Come down and see for yourself!"

"Thank you, I'll take your word for it. I prefer to sit here where I can get this view of you. There's nothing like seeing people in a new light—from a different point." He lighted another cigar, and began to puff smoke clouds about his handsome head. "Now from where I perch," he went on, "I can get the sunlight square upon your hair, and the copper in it just matches the tones in our library. In fact, now I come to think of it, I planned to have this room in copper and gray just to match my wife's hair and eyes! There's nothing like choosing a wife who fits into your surroundings."

"You're a gallant husband if I know one when I meet him!" she replied, glancing up at him lovingly. "And those clouds of gray cigar smoke all about your adorable face just shade in with the gray of my wall-paper. In fact, that's why I let you smoke in my new library at all—because you harmonise so beautifully with these gray tints." She tilted her head to one side and perched, in turn, on the edge of a huge drygoods box, still packed with books. "In fact," she continued, looking up at him saucily, "I like this view of you. There's nothing like having a husband you can look up to."

So they rested a moment, openly and shamelessly admiring each other. Presently Jerry consulted his watch. "In half an hour I must shut myself in my study and grind out my preach. If you want a man to help you unpack that box you'd be wise to set me at it now."

"Never mind the books—I can manage them! But do behead this barrel! If I remember at all, the copper pieces, the antiques and the andiron set are in it. Won't the room be lovely, Jerry, when we hang the gray velour portières and lay the rug!"

Jerry, with a dexterous turn of his hatchet, sent the barrel-head into kindling wood, and Persis plunged arm's length down into the excelsior packing, producing one after another of their wedding gifts.

"How fortunate we were, Jerry, to get so many copper

presents—not a duplicate, too! Did you ever see anything more stunning than this huge antique basin! I shall use it for a library scrap-basket."

"Or a palm, or a pickle kettle! And by and by when we get a baby we'll bathe him in it."

"If you knew more about the latest, most approved sanitary applicances for bathing infants, Jerry, you would never make such a grossly unscientific remark! No indeed! no son of mine will ever be bathed in any but an inflatable, collapsable, portable rubber tub—in true medical fashion."

"Very well! If you choose to wilfully and persistently quarrel with me about the very identical receptacle I prefer to bathe my long-expected, first-born infant name-sake in, I shall depart from you and retire to the solitude of my study. By and by I shall issue forth to look about for some nice girl to help me arrange my books."

So the summer and early autumn days went for them, long days when

> Heart to heart they crushed
> The loneness out of the Past.

They revelled in every detail of their home and the momentous task of running it; they revived the tramping feats of their childhood by exploring the ridge of hills behind the church property; they begrudged every moment of sociability that necessity compelled them to share with their parishioners. It was now that Jerry, after a lifetime of institutional, choppy existence, exulted in the luxury of his study—the novelty of beholding all his books and all his treasures under one snug roof. And Persis, every instinct of her New England housewifery alive, gloried in the slightest ramification of her home-making. Only one rift—always the inevitable one—in the reed of her perfect happiness! Jerry did not seem to shake off the sequel of his overwork as he should have. He

still sat up till unseemly hours, planning his parish work and writing prodigiously. At first she had tried to sit up and wait for him, sewing, reading, to keep herself awake. But his irregular and belated hours broke her rest so much that it all ended in her leaving him to his work and going to her own rest at her accustomed time. And weekly she observed his increasing restlessness and sleeplessness with growing anxiety. Sometimes she would awake in the deep night hours, listening for him; and through the hall-way of the little house, she could hear him pacing back and forth in his study. Then, putting on kimono and slippers, she would tip-toe down to the kitchen and prepare some light, nourishing food for him. After that he would nearly always rest or sleep a few hours, when parish duties would claim him for the day again. This régime went on with intermittent nights of some sleep and no sleep, till October splendour settled over the hills around about Bentley and Persis bethought herself that the time was ripe for her to begin to pay some of her social indebtednesses. She decided to begin the list with the Darrachs.

"I hope, dear, there is no committee, conference, or prayer meeting to-night—that no one will be unkind enough to be sick, married, or die. Because I'm going to give a dinner party and I want my young husband quite to myself."

She paused to speak to Jerry, two pairs of cut-glass candlesticks in her hands, and four pretty red shades balanced in the bend of one arm. He was stalking up and down the brief length of the library, his tall, frock-coated form flitting amongst the warm gray and copper shades like a fitful black cloud, drifted somehow indoors. His forehead was drawn in deep thought, and he looked thinner and more harassed than usual. It struck her with a new force that he was doing an uncommon amount of pacing: heretofore he had confined his perambulations to the study. She tried to recall when she had last seen him at rest, relaxed, and free from mental and nervous

tension; and the rarity of such attitudes startled her into troubled thoughts. Why this growing, ceaseless motility, she asked herself? This great peacelessness that had of late eaten into the very core of his nature, bodily and mentally? She knew that he was happy, inexpressibly, rapturously happy. She knew that he enjoyed his little parish with all the joy of first possession. Were the duties in it too hard for him? Or was he over-zealous, simply? She wondered if there was any reasonable need of his long stretches of night work and study, when he pressed vague and ultra-doctrinal propositions far into sleepless, exhausting hours? Why, especially, should he so frequently be at odds with the elders over so many matters of organisation and doctrine? She could recall several evenings, when, through the closed door of his study, she had heard his voice in heated dispute and remonstrance over some issue of church work, to which the no less positive and firm tones of Elder Gaylord made uncompromising reply.

This much was clear to her, try as she would to reconcile and explain these unhappy and clashing circumstances: Jerry was on the verge of some nervous collapse, and needed most tactful and patient handling. If he went on for the next few months consuming himself in this unnatural manner, the parish must give him a vacation and she must take him off somewhere for quiet and rest. Meanwhile she would keep him off on the hills as much as possible and divert him in the happiness of home life.

"I beg your pardon, Persis! Did you speak?" He paused finally to regard her, after she had made two attempts to divert his abstracted attention.

"Yes. I was just saying that I have invited the Darrachs here for dinner to-night, and that I hope nothing will prevent you from being able to do all in your power to make it pleasant for them."

"Ah, I'll try to recall this fact! But I shall have a very full

day—perhaps you had better remind me again later. Somehow I find myself letting unnecessary details slip, while my mind is so occupied with complex problems."

Passing by the realm to which he had relegated her dinner party, she said, "You work too late nights, Jerry—you're losing a risky amount of sleep. Do try to take your work less intensely, dear! And promise me that you'll take more time to walk with me." She spoke very appealingly, and stepped to the south windows, gazing across fields away beyond Calvin Darrach's hospital to the hills that stretched off miles horizonward. "Look, Jerry," she added, the rhythm of his tread at last working up her sensibilities to a high tension. "Come see these autumn tints and the haze from the Hudson! Doesn't the hill look just as if a great, beautiful Persian palace rug had been thrown over it? And that green oval of the wheat field looks like its centre woven in rich solid colour! To-morrow afternoon I have an engagement with you to climb that hill, darling. We'll play we're moths creeping in amongst the fibres of some rare old rug, and we'll riddle it! We'll bring back enough autumn leaves, Jerry, to turn our little house into a forest!"

Caught by the whimsical turn of her fancy, he paused beside her. "Yes," he agreed, "it is a glory! I accept your invitation, dear. I do need more fresh air and healthy exercise. You must see that I get it, Persis—I grow so engrossed—so swamped in my theology that I sometimes forget I'm living!" Then noting for the first time the table decorations in her hands, he said, "What does all this mean, darling?"

"How absent-minded you are! Why, I'm going to make the table look pretty in honour of our guests, to-night."

"Oh, to be sure! We'll try to give them a good time in a home, won't we? I never saw a fellow enjoy home things the way Cal Darrach does! Last time I went hunting with him, he told me he envied us our home. He's a lovable fellow, Persis! I think of all my parishioners, I'm most fond of Cal."

"Good!" she exclaimed, well satisfied to have him take an interest in anything outside of his work. "And now you must go on with your sermon, and I'll trim the dining room. Good-by, Jerry!"

Promptly at seven Calvin Darrach's new car glided up Piety Hill and deposited him and his blond wife in front of the parsonage. By dint of a series of carefully laid schemes, Persis had at last gotten Jerry into his dress suit: they stood now, all graciousness, greeting their guests. As the four friends filed into the tiny dining room, Calvin's rich deep voice rolled through the first floor with a spontaneous "Charming!"

His exclamatory appreciation was caused by his first glimpse of his hostess's table decorations. She had brought from the hillside behind the house, her unfailing source of home beautification, exercise, and inspiration, great bunches of maple leaves, and had arranged them so skilfully in front of the electric bulbs and several lamps, that their vivid crimson colouring shone through with all the glory of sunshine upon them. Her centrepiece was a cut-glass flaring vase of mammoth crimson carnations in honour of Jerry's Harvard origin. For a favour everybody had a big, shiny, red Baldwin apple.

As Calvin Darrach took in each detail of her care and skill, his eye dwelt longest on the apples. How childish she was, he told himself! How the simplicity of her favours contrasted with the correctness of her speech and demeanour! And a new sense of her charm came to him. Without these little unconscious flashes of childishness, he reflected, she would be too correct. They humanised her so!

"I say, Nell, isn't this a treat after boarding-house communism? No babble and chatter—no roar of gourmand orders —no jangle of silver and china—and no parade of birds' bath tubs circuiting around your plate! Mrs. Wadhams, this is a grateful sight for homesick eyes."

Persis smiled her thanks, wondering how his wife must feel

at such a frank disclosing of her tactics. Then she realised that frankness was one of Calvin Darrach's characteristics. Leastways, he never attempted to conceal his dislike of his present mode of living. Then she remembered that she had put a sofa pillow under the sideboard for Nellie, and arose now to place it behind her guest's shoulders. Nellie had not yet replied to her husband's interrogation, and secretly Persis hoped that her own act might side-track anything so personal. But Nellie settled back gracefully into the down pillow, sighed wearily, and tapping the table-edge with her bloodless, be-jewelled fingers, said, "Yes, Calvin, it's lovely indeed! But think of the work: I just envy Persis the strength to do such things! My husband," and she turned her fragile face to her hostess deferentially, "will never understand that a woman, to keep a household going these days, must have the strength of an Amazon and plenty of excellent help."

Persis's thoughts flowed through the butler's pantry and fastened themselves on her one Swedish woman in the kitchen, while she prayed that some power, as yet undemonstrated, might pilot her through the intricacies of courses. At the same time she was seized with horror lest the conversation of her dinner party was going to pivot on house-maids and kitchen exigencies. She drew herself up in a mighty effort to stem the tide. Instinctively she felt that Calvin Darrach would help her. "Do tell us," she said, with all her peculiar charm of inviting confidences, "about your hospital! I'm full of regret that I haven't been inside of it for two months—not since the day your wife dropped me there when your automobile balked."

A merry laugh went 'round the table. Calvin had been most unfortunate with his automobiles, and aside from the balky one, not three weeks ago his large tonneau had caught fire and burned to a metallic skeleton and a few ashes. His third venture, a splendid swift touring car, was supposedly warrantable and non-obstreperous.

"That's a sensitive and a painful point with me," Calvin went on with his boyish frankness and enthusiasm. "I hope you will excuse me if I seem to draw the conversation toward my other pet fad, the hospital. But some day," he added with tantalising prophecy, between his spoonfuls of tomato bisque, "you'll all be very glad to know me when I make up my party to go touring through the Green Mountains, over Dixville Notch, to the Rangeleys."

"Count me!" cried Jerry. It was apparently the only bit of talk that had filtered in through his mental detachment, this reference to his New England honeymoon.

"Sure thing!" Calvin answered. "Won't you join us, Mrs. Wadhams? I plan to have ladies in my party—this car of mine is no celibate."

"Thank you, I certainly will! Won't it be fun, Nellie? Let's plan what we'll wear! The gentlemen can be planning stopping places."

"Oh," Nellie replied aloofly. "I don't believe I'd care to go! I couldn't stand the strain, you know. The dust and the exhaustion of long trips quite overcome me. A trip to New York, even, gives me a wretched headache!"

Jerry twisted wearily in his chair and looked bored and cross. Persis felt the necessity of placing her guest in a new light before her husband, and so turned to Nellie with, "What an opportunity for usefulness and good you have in the hospital!" It was a clumsy blunder, she told herself instantly. She should have recalled the day Nellie visited the General Hospital.

Nellie shuddered daintily. "Oh!" she expostulated. "I almost never go to the wards! The sights there depress me so. I am much interested, though, in foreign missions. Don't you think the new president of our society, Miss Atwood, is too lovely for words? She is the one who first interested me in the cause."

Persis stiffened perceptibly, and across the background of her memory there echoed the footfall of a light firm step now treading—where on India's plague-swept Deccan plain? She looked across the table helplessly at Jerry, her eyes beseeching his aid. But he was glaring gloomily into the vitals of the roast duck, on the point of attack, and left her to work out her own salvation.

"I don't know Miss Atwood at all well," she finally replied, with bald truthfulness.

"Really? She's our leading churchwoman in Bentley, too! I must see that you have opportunity to appreciate her lovely qualities—she's so intellectual and brilliant! I shall bring her to call on you soon. Wednesday is your afternoon in, is it not?"

Thrown out of her composure by Nellie's missionary chatter, Persis tried to recall some of the happy, inspiring topics she had planned to discuss at dinner. She was too inexperienced a hostess to know that table conversation is not to be wooed or directed by any premeditated plans. A sick, discouraged sense swept over her. She realised anew that Jerry had hardly spoken a word since his welcome. Why was he so glum? Her dinner was falling flat, she told herself. At last her husband, having dismembered and distributed the duck, came to her rescue by taking up some simple, polite line of discussion with Nellie, and Calvin, experienced, perfect guest that he was, went back to his hostess's inquiry about his hospital, soon charming her to animation and sympathetic interest in life again.

"I want to answer your request by asking you a question. But first of all I want to ask you if you enjoy your home?"

It was an odd inquiry to make of a bride. Moreover, it kindled in her memory flashes from out the past, bygone homelessness, dreary waits—detached, yearning parts of her, which, by reaction, grew into the flame of her passionate,

all-satisfying love of her present shelteredness. And mingled with these sensations was another akin to resentment, that a man so new in friendship should dare to ask her anything so personal. But when she met the look in his eyes, its kindliness, its deference, the complete naturalness of his manner disarmed her resentfulness, and she said merely, with a ring in her voice, "Yes, I enjoy my home!"

"You can't think what pleasure it gives me to hear you say so, because I built your home." He smiled at her and paused, inviting graciousness; but she had nothing to say to him yet, and he went on. "Yes, I had the honour of drawing up the plans for the new parsonage. And whenever the inspiration came to me to add a cosey touch here and there, I always hoped that a young couple, preferably a bride and groom, would come to enjoy it."

Again his words had a strange power to move her, because they showed her how unjust and crude had been her resentment. "I did not know," she said apologetically. "How grateful Jerry and I are to you!"

Jerry, bored to find that no subject of conversation seemed to interest Nellie except that which referred to herself, pricked up his ears at the mention of his name on his wife's lips, shifted his fitful attention to the autumn decorations on the sideboard, and finally on Calvin. Nellie, left so peremptorily to her own devices, and moreover being wearily and wifely sure of the import of her husband's story, began to amuse herself by making a minute and critical inspection of the embroidered monogram in the corner of her hostess's damask table cloth.

"Thank you! That repays me already. When I first came to Bentley," and Calvin gave a comprehensive glance around the little group to make his remarks general, having already attempted three times to converse with Jerry and to no avail— "there stood here on the top of Piety Hill an incommodious, dilapidated old church, a relic of the early settlers' worship.

It was my privilege to watch grow in its place the little granite church that your husband is now pastor of." This with a glance at Persis.

"Then the question of a Presbyterian parsonage hung in the lower balance pan of our church scales and discussions, till by force of bull-dog persistency I was at last able to wring from Miss Atwood, and certain others of our 'pillars,' enough money to build this little snuggery."

Nellie, flaming with protest at the implied parsimony of her latest heroine, Miss Atwood, took up a defense of her, appealing trustfully to Jerry for support. He, grateful to discover that Nellie could discuss any topic outside of her own ill health, gave a lackadaisical acquiescence to the benevolencies of his absent parishioner. . And while his wife gushed to the minister over Miss Atwood's praises, Calvin directed his remarks to Persis once more.

"Some day when you feel more accustomed to the idiosyncrasies and possibilities of the Bentleyites, and have the inclination to take up some interest outside of the church, I shall ask you to become one of our Hospital Board. We need some one trained and broad-minded like you amongst the flock of women's committees. May I count on you?"

He turned to her with his frank charm of voice and manner and eyes, as if he did not know that as yet she had taken no part in church work; and she felt how next to impossible it was to deny anybody a request vouched so wistfully.

She met him with all her charm of response, and instantly she felt herself lifted on to higher ground, encompassed by a rare atmosphere that harmonised with her tenderest capacities. She asked herself why this big strong man beside her had such a power to put her at her best? No answer came to the question, which penetrated farther into her deep consciousness, as our questionings always do when we detach ourselves from the hurry of life long enough to explore psychic realms. Afterwards

she wondered how Calvin Darrach interpreted this silence with which she had met his question?

At last she had found words to reply to him. "I shall always be glad to do whatever I can to help you."

Then the conversation became general again; after some further exchange of good cheer and happy banter about Calvin's tour through the Green Mountains, and cigars for the gentlemen, the Darrachs prepared to betake themselves home in the new car. As Calvin stood with his hand on the door-knob saying his thanks and good-bys, he gave a despairing "Help!" and with a huge sigh of relief, exclaimed, "A thousand pardons! I almost forgot the best part of all the dinner!"

Stalking back to the dining-room, ducking his head to take two doorways, he returned grinning like a school boy, his red apple in one hand.

Nellie gave a little sniff of depreciation. "At times, Calvin, you can be profoundly silly!" she said. Then, swathed in veils and furs, and protesting that the night air was bad for her lungs, she turned to her hostess. "I've had a charming evening. Remember—I shall bring Miss Atwood to call on you soon! She's so optimistic and sweet—she'll do you lots of good!"

And taking Calvin's arm she minced down the hill to her automobile.

CHAPTER XI

JERRY, with his nervous hands clamped behind his black ministerial coat, with his mobile face drawn into lines unpleasantly determined and stern, tramped to and fro in the small space between his desk and the book-shelves in his study, whither he had just summoned his wife by a somewhat peremptory note delivered by the Swedish woman. Persis, with great grieved eyes and exaggerated pallor of face, sat on the extreme front edge of an exceptionally commodious leather armchair. Her upright, tense posture threw the empty spaciousness behind her, so obviously intended for comfort, into bold relief. Her lips were tight, speechless; and if they quivered a bit at his last declarations Jerry was too perturbed to notice it. Why should he? The time had come when an important domestic, social, and religious question must be tried and settled. They must thrash it out between them. The hour was decidedly one of the mind, not of the heart.

"Really, Persis, your position as my wife demands it! I could tell from Mrs. Darrach's conversation at dinner last night that people are already beginning to wonder why you do not take a more concrete interest in church work. Perhaps you do not realise that you have not attended prayer meeting with me once for a month. Miss Atwood has evidently been discussing it broadcast! The next step beyond wonder is speculation, and speculation is twin sister to criticism."

Still she sat motionless except for the rhythm in which her left foot tapped the rug. Once she seemed on the point of saying something, but her lips refused to move. She wondered if they were glued together?

"It seems to me, Persis, you might be willing to take up some

one branch of all the difficult work I'm trying so hard to organise. If Foreign Missions antagonise you so, why—there are Clubs for young factory girls! You could do a world of good amongst them; you could form sewing classes for them and teach them how to make suitable and attractive garments for themselves; or you could lecture to them once a week on hygiene. Or you might start a library for them, and so feed their minds and enlarge their hearts." The possibilities carried him away into regions of reformatory zealousness. "If anybody needs sympathetic oversight and guidance God knows it's these young homeless girls, exposed to the health-destroying, grinding routine of factory life for self-support all day, and turned loose to tramp the streets for recreation at night! It's awful, it's appalling, the way they are exposed to all kinds of the worst dangers!" His eyes dilated and flashed with the conviction his own eloquence carried. Still Persis did not speak. He turned to her suddenly with, "Why in Heaven's name don't you say something? Can't you talk? Don't you know how it irritates a man when his wife just sits still, perfectly mute, while he's trying his best to expound some important truth to her? You might at least try to round out my ideas and show me you understand my side of the question, Persis."

"Would you have me rush in where angels fear to tread?" She had waited a moment before putting her question, and her voice was very low and evenly modulated.

"Rush in? Heavens, no! I can't fancy you ever rushing anywhere! But I would have you evince some slight interest in the vast subjects that I have chosen for my life work. At present you appear absolutely torpid—untouched by the magnificent chances of usefulness that I've placed before you. Bentley is a perfect laboratory for social and religious reform!"

"Jerry, would you be willing to give me time to get my bearings?" The voice trembled a bit and the tones were almost a plea for forbearance, patience. "Remember that I can't

plunge in with two-thirds of me, while the other third lies dormant or resisting. To do good sincere work, the only kind of work that bears fruit—I have to feel that my mind, heart, and body are coördinating. Believe me, I am not antagonistic to your work here—I am not out of sympathy with you! I am studying, watching, feeling my way among the Bentleyites daily. And when I see my chance to do the peculiar, especial kind of work that I feel myself fitted for, I shall act, and act promptly."

It was a long speech for her to make, and she made it with a good showing of defense. He waved it to one side with a comprehensive gesture, and replied, "Ah—but the precious time lost—the irrevocable chances gone! It's the old judiciousness in you—the caution, the suspended sentence—the dominating traits of your fathering."

"Perhaps! But it's my birthright—and it can be made to work out for a blessing, as well as a curse. When I do start some line of work I shall be quite apt to stand by it and see it through. I may even achieve something of which you will be ever so proud."

She had given him a noble chance to say something kind. But far back in the recesses of his mind there evidently struggled other issues. And the argumentative wave submerged him to his chin. As he denied her kindness, she felt the need of further self-justification, and went on. "You surely are aware that in your parish there are an exceptional number of straight-laced, elderly ladies. I am not at all sure but that any very radical or aggressive movement on the part of their pastor's wife would call out unhappy expressions of censure and amazement. It has repeatedly been borne in upon me at several of the church functions that my best service to you was one of conservatism. But please believe me when I say that I have these same well-meaning but very contracted ladies well under my observation! When I feel sure that the grace to

handle them tactfully and to work among them has entered into me, I shall come to you for advice and suggestions."

But Jerry's mood was not to be so easily mollified. With a deeper frown of perplexity, he kept on his beat around the room, while she drew a full breath and braced herself for a new hold on the edge of the leather chair.

"That's all very well! I have no intention of forcing you into church work. But sometimes it is borne in upon me with appalling surety that you are not a Christian, Persis—that our souls are to go on eternally playing hide and seek with each other amongst religious convictions—that always in your heart you resent my change from the law to the ministry. Am I right? Tell me the truth, Persis! If I misjudge you, let me crave pardon! But the time has come when I must know how it stands between us with our souls."

Again she had the sensation that if he had struck her body, the blow would have been insignificant compared to this his last.

He went on. "If it ever came to a decision between my love for you and my love for the church, I do not know how it would go with me." He spoke with peculiar intensity, and bit the words off, in his passion of earnestness and nervousness. "I lie awake nights, wondering, searching, striving to see how the future is going for us! At times it just unfits me for my duties. God help me if I'm making too hard work of what should be so plain between us!"

She started to put out her hands to him, but instead clasped them tightly over her crossed knees. "Jerry, give me time! Let me live by you, so closely—" and she swayed forward slightly from her upright posture in a little pitiful act of supplication—"let me grow into the faith until I get the full inspiration of your own white light. Lead me gently, gradually, Jerry—into the fulness of your faith. It is all well between us—our love will save us—never fear!"

He paused at the farther end of the study. "All the same," he said, ignoring her appeal for help, "I am distressed by such possibilities, as abstract as they seem to you. This inner restlessness is wearing on me!"

The confession of his physical weariness gripped her heart anew. "I can see that it does, Jerry, and I've been on the point of speaking to you about it for days! We made a mistake, dear, in coming to Bentley so soon after your graduation. We should have taken more time for our honeymoon—curbed our impatience to get into the little home! However, it's not too late to repair our mistake. You must ask for two or three months' vacation and we'll go off somewhere in the mountains, about Christmas time—for a long rest. It will do you worlds of good, Jerry, and put you in perfect trim for your work."

He faced her violently. "There you are again—meddling with my church duties! Trying to take me away from God's work! Do you think I would have the audacity and nerve to ask for a long vacation when I've only been here three months? The idea is preposterous!"

"I think if the elders knew how hard you have overworked to fit yourself to serve them, for the past ten years, they would insist on your going," she said quietly.

"Well, there is one thing that you might just as well understand first as last, Persis! I shall not ask for such a favour—neither would I go if they granted it! I can't afford it," he added, as if by afterthought.

"Nonsense! Of course you can afford it. What you absolutely can't afford is to break down entirely. And besides, I know of the loveliest, most inviting little hunting lodge down in the North Carolina mountains, near Asheville, that we could rent very reasonably. One of my men friends owns it."

She had hoped to entice him to rest by the idea of mountains and hunting. But he only turned to her with, "One of your

men friends? Have you so many men friends that I know nothing at all about?"

"Don't be disturbed unnecessarily! It's only Sallie's cousin—I haven't even met him yet! But I know he has such a place, and I think we could rent it. I will write and see."

"You will please do nothing of the kind!" There was no mistaking the authority his words expressed. He fixed his flaming eyes upon her, and repeated with increasing emphasis, "I tell you I will not leave my work! I can't afford it—I haven't the money."

"I can, if you can't! What has happened to your money? You were uncommonly well fixed with your inheritance. How comes it that you can't take a little rest that you need so piteously?"

"I've lost my money—most of it! That is—I gave it away," he added reflectively.

"Gave it away?" she echoed. "To whom?"

"To boys' clubs, and missions, and things down in the slums of New York—and for God's furtherance. It's a great work, Persis!"

But as she peered down the uncertain years ahead of them she asked herself if it was sordid and selfish and mean of her to feel this anxiety about their own material welfare? Jerry, with all the psychic cunning that he seemed to be accumulating daily, anticipated her fears. "Don't worry about your future," he said. "God will provide!"

"I'm not worrying about myself! I'm worrying about you. Can't you trust my knowledge of nursing and medicine enough to be guided by me this once, dear?" Her manner was very mollifying. But he dashed past her in his reckless pacing, and flung his reply at her so that her face stung and smarted.

"Can't you let my health alone? You've already undermined my faith with your scepticism—taken the heart out of my religion! And now you're trying to tamper with my health!

It's cruel—it's intolerable and maddening, Persis! Can't you see that I want the time now for meditation and prayer? Would you be so very considerate as to leave me alone for the rest of the morning?"

He opened the door for her, standing deferentially to one side, a gallant if a gloomy personage, waiting for her to pass out. Reflecting that it was by his own summons that she had thus imposed herself on the sanctity of his study, with her proud head slightly inclined and with mute lips, she passed by him and returned to her own room.

The minister and his wife met, as usual, at the luncheon table. And although he kept silence, she was relieved to see that his tempestuous mood had passed. While they were finishing their fruit course, the door-bell rang, and a delivery boy from the most prominent men's furnishing shop in Bentley shoved a big package into the slow arms of the Swedish woman and skedaddled down the hill with unusual despatch.

As Jerry and Persis left the dining-room she stopped before the hall table, exclaiming, "What a huge package! It reminds me of Christmas time. Have you been shopping, Jerry?"

"Yes; I thought I'd buy myself a few neckties. Would you like to see them?"

"Yes, indeed! I'd be much interested." She sat down on next to the bottom step of the stairs, while Jerry went through his pockets for his jack-knife. Heretofore he had always insisted that she buy his neckties. She had done it since the day her father had taken them both to a country fair, Jerry aged eleven and she eight, and under the excitement and stimulation of the fair's marvellous and splendid sights, Jerry had confessed to her that he "hated sashes" and above all earthly articles wanted a "bow tie." Under the pretext of repeating their visit to the somewhat distant and stately coops of the Plymouth Rock chickens, they had stolen away hand in hand back to the little village store. And with all the pomp and

ceremony that the occasion demanded, she had invited the nervous and delighted Jerry to pick out the tie he liked best of all, and had paid for it with her own money. She could see it yet—the tie of his heart's desire! It flashed before her eyes with all its old, imposing glory. It was a winy red, and ever and anon prim little blue flowers, that Jerry insisted were June pinks, sat in precise and modest state along its satiny length. It had been too new, too choice, too secret, to be donned at once! So Jerry, in a noble burst of generosity, had bought her five sticks of cinnamon candy as an outward and visible sign of his grateful appreciation; and still tolerating his checkered Windsor tie, had crammed his new one down in the depths of his overcoat pocket, where, all the rest of the day, he could finger it frequently and lovingly. The next night—he had afterward confessed to her—in the security and privacy of his own room, and after he had observed his uncle's manipulations long enough to be sufficiently sure of that first complex start, he had struggled with his new gift until he had overcome it, in a splendid triumph of masculine neckwear. Thereby, through her generosity the day of the fair, Persis had established for herself a life-time precedent. As Jerry passed over the exceedingly personal and ornate stage of youthful adornment, he gradually allowed her to choose his neckwear, as well as buy it, protesting that her taste was perfect—perfect enough to suit him.

As she watched his nervous fingers cut the string and tear off the paper that wrapped his purchase, she longed to remind him of the day they had shopped for the winy "bow tie." But she knew the penalty of distracting Jerry from intense application to any subject in hand, and so refrained. Stripping off the lacy paper edging that bordered the box, he drew the silken folds of a baby-blue, brocaded four-in-hand out of its orderly bed and held it triumphantly before her.

"Isn't that a beauty?" he exclaimed. "A man can't be

forever wearing these black, ministerial-cut things! They're too funereal! I wanted a change! Don't you like it?"

"Yes—it's a gorgeous creature, dear," she replied, observing its luxuriant long ends. "But when do you ever intend to wear it?"

"When will I wear it? Why, I'll wear it every day! don't you find it good enough? I paid two dollars and a half for it!"

Despite his decorum, she laughed merrily. The vision of the tall, correct, athletic Jerry, stately and trim behind the solid oak of his pulpit, with a baby-blue necktie topping the clerical cut of his broadcloth, was too much for her.

"I plainly see you don't like my taste," he said. He had the air of a man who has been snubbed and hurt unnecessarily. "Very well! Then I'll wear it with my hunting togs. That would look nice with my brown corduroy trousers, wouldn't it? If you like them better, I bought plenty of black ones—look here!"

He clutched open box after box of rampant colours, tossing them to one side, till he finally came to the black ones. With something of the dexterity of the nimble salesman, he arranged them deftly along the edge of the hall table. She calculated there must have been at least two dozen black string ties, and how many coloured ones! Jerry, aglow with his pride of selection, stooped over and produced ascot after ascot, four-in-hand after four-in-hand. There was hardly a style in men's neckwear that he had not sampled—except the "made tie." She was thankful that she had been spared that! She calculated that there must be at least four dozen in all. "What do you intend to do with so many, Jerry? Surely you'll pick out what you need and send the rest back."

"Send them back? I guess not! Didn't I put in one solid hour this morning choosing them? I don't purpose to waste my time like that!" Then his quick smile flitted over his face, and his voice took on all its lovable qualities. "A man can't have too many neckties, you know, dear!"

It was impossible for her to gainsay him—there was so little of the nagger in her. She accepted his explanatory sweetness; after all what mattered it whether Jerry bought his neck-ties singly or all in a bunch? They were necessary articles of dress, her New England thrift assured her. On the whole, she rather enjoyed his unique attitude about them—of course, he was merely fooling about the baby-blue one! She worshipped originality and individualisation—that was why she had always loved Sallie Howe. So she answered his smile with another, and he said, engagingly, "Wouldn't you like to arrange them in my top bureau drawer for me, dear? All neatly in rows, like a parade, you know! I must get at my sermon on Transubstantiation now!" He lighted a cigar, blew a kiss to her, and disappeared into the study.

She still sat a moment on the stairs, taking in the extent of her husband's purchase: her loving toleration of all his eccentricities did not let her see anything too strange in his act. One by one, she told herself, she could discreetly dispose of the impossibilities amongst his ties, the purple and the flaming red ones!—and so keep him from any perilous breach of ministerial raiment, without hurting his feelings. His poor feelings—that seemed riding on the crest of a cyclone of exposure to hurt, of late! She made three trips up and down stairs, her arms laden with boxes; and all the while she was laying the neck-ties away in the top drawer of Jerry's bureau, the gaudy ones at the bottom—out of sight, out of mind, she told herself—vacation plans and fancies of the hunting lodge kept running through her mind. That morning, in the heat of impatience, Jerry had forbidden her to write about the lodge. But then, people who were overworked and distressed nervously never were the best judges of what was good for themselves. Really, it had been Jim Kimberley himself who had suggested the idea to her: in one of his letters he had assured her how pleased he would be if she and her husband would visit his hunting lodge

sometime. Moreover he was always sending messages by Sallie that she must let him know if he could ever do anything for her. Very well: here was a good chance to test some of his demonstrations of friendship. As Sallie always said, what were friends good for except to go to when you needed help? She reflected that it was quite as fine to be willing to ask for needed aid as it was to be willing to aid some one needy. Her pride was so free from any shoddiness that now the quality of its frankness, its trueness, was peculiarly dominant. Anyway there could be no harm in asking Jim Kimberley if he would rent his lodge for the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Perhaps Sallie could visit them—perhaps Jim Kimberley himself would appear on the scene and so break the spell that always kept her from ever meeting him. But best of all, it would be such an ideal spot for Jerry to rest in! Dominated by this last impulse she stepped to her desk and brought out her address book. Yes, there it was—Sallie's New England address in care of the Kimberleys and their estate outside of Boston. She caught up her pen and wrote, and summoning the Swedish woman, despatched her to the post-office with the note.

CHAPTER XII

PERSIS, forlorn in mind and bruised in spirit, sat in the south window seat of her own room, embroidering. Her thoughts were far from her work, but she kept at it, because she felt strangely steadier when she stitched, and for the soothing effect a bit of light sewing always had on her nerves. Was it the ancestral instinct of the fingers, fostered by the shades of her New England grandmothers? Grandmothers who, perchance, wove into the manifold yards of homespun, out of which they patiently fashioned the durable apparel of their menfolks, the fond imaginings of their glowing minds and the long desires of their reserved hearts? Or who knitted into the countless pairs of striped woolen stockings and the checkered mittens of prolific families their austere longings and deep heart-aches?

The Swedish woman gave a resounding whack on the door and delivered a note scrawled on a scrap of foolscap, on the back of which were some incoherent jottings of a sermon on the Atonement.

If Jerry's beloved will graciously forgive and rap on the study door at 10 minutes past 3, she will find a boy who is abjectly, contritely sorry he quarrelled and hurt her, and who wants to be taken for a long walk over the hill.

Despite her heart-ache she folded Jerry's note, and tucking it in the front of her white flannel Russian blouse suit, resumed her embroidery listlessly. Somehow Jerry's contrition did not thrill her as it used to; neither did it bring her the solace that it obviously should have done. Habit had inured her to it, had rendered it too commonplace and makeshift. It had not been part of her ideal for their married existence that daily and hourly life should become a panorama of hysterical, high-

pitched scenes of misunderstanding and disputation, alternating with tumultuous overtures of regret and reconciliation. Something was wrong somewhere, she warned herself bitterly. For the past month Jerry had counterbalanced his fits of violent irritability and cyclonic temper with antipodal moods of contrition and royal amiability. It was all most unlike him, she told herself; always he had had a standard reputation for lovableness and magnetism. And of all the old friends who knew and loved him, she asked herself, who among them would recognise him now? Could it be that she was not managing him right? Was there some hidden, mysterious influence in her make-up, heretofore unrevealed despite the long intimacy of their early youth, that warred against some essential trait of his temperament? Was she too exacting? Was her passion for perfection going to make her sacrifice Jerry as an offering? Was it too much to ask of destiny peace and love in the same breath? She sat rigidly in her window-seat, pondering, ruminating, classifying, tormenting herself, till the little Dresden clock on her writing desk softly chimed three. Then she hurried out of her white suit, donned a short skirt of heavy gray stuff, and buttoning a gray sweater about her throat, stepped to her cheval glass to adjust a walking hat of the same colour and modish with a blue cock's feather. She even glanced down at her feet to be sure that her boots were heavy enough for the tramp. For the ground was rough and frozen, and the November day chill.

Consoling herself with the thought that she looked well, at least, regardless of how she felt, she went lightly down stairs, along the hall, and rapped softly on the study door. Her heart beat quickly in the momentary hush, as with inclined head she held her ear to the door, listening to catch the sound of Jerry's spring toward her. They were almost worth it, these quarrels—the sweetness of this "making-up." But this time no stir came from the study, and leaning nearer she rapped

again, more loudly. Still no response! With a dread in her heart, she opened the door and let herself into an unoccupied room. Not a sign of Jerry, bodily, anywhere—only his mental accessories—books, penholders, papers, strewn about in wild disorder. She stepped back into the hall, and a glance at the settle told her that his hat and overcoat were gone. So Jerry, after making an engagement to walk with her, had left the house without her, and without explanation. She looked at her watch—perhaps she was a moment late, and so had made him impatient. Of late Jerry had shown an unrighteous dislike to hindrances. But her watch registered nine minutes past three. One minute of grace, she told herself! Ah, the time was coming when she would need more grace than that! Could she go through life on a margin of one minute, forsooth, or else bring upon herself misunderstanding, disappointment, and misconnection?

A big desire for the cool air came over her, and she stepped out onto the porch; but this time the outdoors failed her. A wave of immense primitive wrath, increasing proportionately as she reviewed the humiliations and the petty dissensions of the past two months, swept over her, changing her pallor to waxiness. All her blood seemed to leave the surface of her body and swamp in around her heart. It was the first time she had ever been enraged with Jerry—the first time she had ever seen a landscape by the incandescent light of anger. It was not essentially that he had gone off to walk without her. It was the accumulation of weeks of neglect and hurt, the oftentimes public mortification of her pride by his childish, wilful disregard of her privileges and rights. Then instantly a fear of her anger came to her, and with a great mental effort she got a grip on her feelings again, shuddering as the last wave of her wrath dwindled out in the capillaries of her external circulation.

She gazed off across the fields to the southeastward where the little village of Bentley, spruce and secure, hugged itself in a

neat embrace at the foot of the hill. A mile away in front of her, on another hilly prominence, lay Bentley Hospital. Its red brick pile, outlined with granite trimmings, stood out plainly against the dull fall shades. She recalled the first description of it that she had ever had—Jerry's description, the day he told her about his call to Bentley, in the Howe's rose garden. Ah, he had been willing to wait twenty minutes for her then! And he had said that Calvin Darrach's hospital was a stunning structure, well calculated to stand the strain and needs of coming years. As she stood gazing cross-lots at it, she asked herself if the house she and Jerry were building, the house not made with hands, was calculated to endure the strain and needs of the coming years, also? The idea of durance translated into terms of her own personal experiences, worked upon her overwrought nerves and hurt feelings subtilely. As soon as she felt that her muscles would coördinate again, she struck out across the sear, frozen lawn, and took the road that wound spirally up the big hill.

So still was the air that the November day seemed to pause in its passing and hold its breath—perhaps to gain fresh capacity for its mighty gale easterly and its leap off the brink of the Palisades into the Hudson. For although Persis came, root and fibre, from the land of tempestuous mountain gales, the wind storms of Bentley's nights were still an awesome novelty to her. Now the atmosphere was a crystallisation of cold and calm. The indifferent sun huddled behind drab nondescript clouds, that let its shadow through them sulkily, dimly, reminding her of a bit of worn gray flannel that, being held up to the daylight, shows its thin spots and moth patches hopelessly. The gaunt and naked elm trees around the church lifted their bony arms to heaven, as if, prescient of the winter blasts and snows so close upon them, they besought mercy or the power to endure. The russet ground resounded with the click of her quick steps, and the dry bloodless oak-leaves rustled a half-

lifelike response, as she scuffled through them in her heavy-soled boots. Presently, on a level stretch part way up the hillside, she passed a cornfield, cut and stacked into semblance of tenting ground. With a backward, painful swing of memory she recalled the days in New England when she and Jerry used to frolic in her grandfather's cornfield, playing it was an Indian village, the stubble of stalks a stockade, and the corn stacks wigwams. The sear rustic scene palled on her imagination now, and she hurried past it, conscious that the only bit of bright colour in the landscape was the occasional pumpkins scattered about on the unharvested field.

She flew on over the hard road, aiming for the hilltop. Then across the still unbreathing air, from rearward, her alert ear told her, came the distant throb, throb, of an engine, and presently Calvin Darrach's car came plunging on up the hill behind her, as oblivious of ascent and grade as some winged thing in the air. With a sudden secretive dread of being discovered in her wretchedness, she made shifting plans of escape. Her first impulse was to hide behind a corn stack. Then just ahead she saw a little shack of a house on the edge of the roadside, and she told herself she might hide in it till he passed. But this conduct seemed so utterly childish; and beside, the indignity of it forbade her; for Calvin Darrach was already spinning across the level stretch by the cornfield, and would surely see and wonder at her action. No. Better to walk on, nonchalantly—perhaps he would, in his swift passage, fail to recognise her. Or perhaps he, too, was bound for the hilltop, to work off some enthralling, cursed worry sitting on his soul!

"What luck!" A moment later the pulsating iron heart stopped beside her, and Calvin's vibrant voice rang out full and strong on the quiet air. "Mrs. Wadhams, won't you let me take you up the hill?"

He jumped out of his car, and stood by the rear tire, visored cap in hand, his left arm extended in courtly gesture of wafting

her to a seat. As she looked at him, his blue eyes alight with pleasure at finding her, his abundant brown hair waving back from his thin, beardless face aglow with the invigoration of outdoors, she was struck anew with the superb picture of manhood that he made. Like some young knight of old, she mused, on the point of bearing off a lady—only in a twentieth century touring car, instead of on a richly caparisoned white steed, and dressed in a coat of raccoon skin, instead of in a coat of mail.

It seemed silly to refuse to ride with him. "Thank you," she said simply, and allowed him to arrange the robes about her snugly. He put his foot, heroic in size, on the creature's throbbing heart: with his powerful, gauntleted hands he turned a collar about its vibrating throat; and the responsive thing dashed up the hill valiantly. Before the next bend in the roadway, however, he brought the car to a sudden stop. "You're trembling—you're cold," he said. "Only a sweater while I'm swathed in this fur coat! Here, do let me put this blanket about you." And he produced somewhere from the steel vitals of the creature a heavy robe and wrapped her tightly in it, obliterating her outlines up to her eyes. "That's better," he said, well satisfied with his labour.

"Thank you," she answered him again. It was good to be thus shielded and voluntarily cared for.

On they sped, lost in the exhilaration of flashing through space without quite discarding contact with the old earth so dear to mortals still. Presently Calvin tamed his steed to a pace conducive to talk, and Persis asked, "How's Nellie?"

He looked down in her eyes, quietly and without hesitation or embarrassment answered, "I do not know."

"Don't know how your wife is?" she repeated, thinking he was treating her to some of his youthfulness to amuse her. But instantly she saw how sober he was, and that his eyes looked troubled. And his next reply startled her further with its unexpectedness.

"I have no wife. Before I went to Pittsburg Wednesday on a business trip, I had one! When I came back late last night I found our apartment locked, the rooms deserted and lonely—no greeting and no message as to my wife's whereabouts. Obviously, it was a choice bit of gossip for the 'guests' of the boarding house, and all day I have been under the painful necessity of prevaricating about my knowledge of Nell's exact location."

She realised, to his frank and above-board nature, how odious dissimulation would be. "I'm so sorry," she said. At the same time it flashed over her that she and Calvin were two derelicts, floating about mateless on the same sea.

"I knew you'd be sorry—else I should never have told you. Of course, I infer that Nell has gone to her mother in Baltimore. I have telegraphed her there. If I don't get a return 'gram by eight o'clock to-night, I shall set out to find her."

Persis had a compelling desire to beg him, in his searchings for his wife, to keep an eye open for her Jerry. But she managed to control her impulse, likewise her anxiety.

"I hope I sha'n't be forced to make this trip, however. I could hardly spare time from the office now. Our vice-president is sick and there's an uncommon pile of new orders. I ought to be in New York slaving this very minute, but somehow Nell's disappearance has upset me so I can't work. I know 'twas best for me to keep out of the office till I get my nerve again."

To Persis there was something very pitiful in his aspect, the aspect of a strong all-rounded man thus proclaiming his helplessness and suffering at the hands of a weak, petulant little woman. She longed to say something comforting, but was constrained by the question as to what she could say in a situation so delicate. Before she had decided on something that should be loyal to Nellie and consoling to Calvin, he went on: "Perhaps 'tisn't quite all Nell's fault. You see, I promised her

I'd be home Friday morning—I always try to catch the night trains—she worries so when she's left alone. Well, I didn't return till late last night. When the matter of a goodly number of millions of feet of steel castings came up in a business deal, it seemed expedient for me to remain over and clamp the order. I telegraphed—but possibly Nell didn't get my message."

His hurt, wounded feelings, and the generosity of his attitude toward his wife again appealed to Persis. She had an almost uncontrollable desire to tell him her own trouble and so share grief with him; but her reticence won out. And Calvin Darrach, as if to run away from his distress, sent the car booming along over the hill road. Presently a sharp curve brought them to the lookout, and they stopped to inspect the little town of Bentley. Just in front of them the bluff of the Palisades hid the Hudson from view, but off northward, where the river swung in between its gorge-like banks, they could get the cold steely profile of it at the foot of the Catskills. Soon Persis's heart drew her eyes away from the thrilling expanse of river, back to the townscape below her. She saw especially four buildings, Calvin Darrach's house, his hospital, the little Presbyterian church, and her own home, all located on choice hilly prominences, and three of them tributes to his public spiritedness; substantial monuments of the fact that although a hard-worked business man he had still found time and inclination to regard the needs of his fellow townsmen. As she beheld her own home—empty and lifeless when she left it—she wondered if Jerry had returned yet? Was he waiting for her there now, missing her, as Calvin Darrach had missed his wife? Her companion turned to her, pointing off towards his hospital, and with a voice that invited sympathy and approval, asked, "Isn't it a grand old heap of brick?" And as he gazed at it, something of his habitual buoyancy and brightness entered into his bearing again. She wondered if he had, perchance, built it in something of the same spirit she had put

in her two years at the Training School, and if it stood to him now for a diversion, a satisfaction to some inherent need of his to give?

"Yes," she agreed, "it's magnificent! It's perfect! How is it running now?"

"Indifferently, with hitches—not at all my idea of how such a place should go. I would have it run like clockwork, without friction."

"What hitches?"

"Do you know, I believe I made a mistake in allowing so many women on the Board of Trustees," he confided. "It should have been run exclusively by men. I hope you'll understand me when I say that men have an infinitely better business sense than women—in such affairs. We need the women—deplorably! We need them to do all the countless tender, helpful things about such charities. But when it comes to management—Heaven spare us! With so many of them on the Board, they haggle and fuss and quibble over insignificant little details that don't amount to a hill of beans either way, till the Hospital is like a nest of hornets ready to swarm. However," he added more cheerfully, "it will all come out right!"

"Ah, but hospitals are the least of my cares now!" He backed his car around so that the little town scene lay behind them, and facing northward toward the river-view, said heartily: "Here lies the real poetry of Bentley! Do you know that the Indians called the Hudson 'Shatemuc,' 'The River of Mountains?' See that beautiful meadow over there, nestling down on the slopes of the Catskills? That farm used to belong to my uncle. And when I was a boy my parents very wisely used to pack me off out of New York City every summer and turn me loose up here on these hills. It was the making of me—gave me time and room to spread and grow in." She glanced at him, feeling the superb strength and healthfulness of the man in body and mind. And for the first time she felt his kinship with

mountains. Or better, she was able to define and classify her fund of impressions about him, by saying to herself that the traits she most admired in him, the strength and poise of his body, the breadth and firmness of his mind, and the steadfast, high moral qualities about him, were the birthright of the boy who spent all his summers in mountain places.

Unmindful of her reckoning of him, he went on enthusiastically. "Yes, there used to be Indian trails all along here—some of our best roads in Bentley are nothing but elaborations of Mohawk trails! Ah," and he closed his eyes, uptilting his face slightly, "I still see the young braves, bedecked and awesome in paint, feathers and murderous tomahawks, escorting the old River along past the Palisades!" He turned to her once more engagingly. "When I was a boy I used to read Cooper's novels nights and tramp over these ridges daytimes, peopling the woods and river banks with my own fancies—Mohawk braves gliding down the Hudson in graceful birch-bark canoes, stealing through the primeval forests that used to cloak these slopes, or sitting in weird and sombre dignity around roaring camp-fires, plotting sometimes peace, oftentimes hellish massacre. I actually used to see the lower boughs swing and the beech leaves flutter softly, as some young brave of my fancy stalked nobly past me on his way to the council fires." She smiled at him, for his words reinforced another impression of him that she had gained a few weeks before, that his imagination had unusually fine and supple qualities. The god-given trait had passed so many mortals by! He drove his car forward, to the very farthest edge of the lookout, as if forcing his body to keep pace with his thoughts. "Yonder lies the old Albany Road," he pointed, "that used to take my Dutch ancestors northward to Fort Orange. Did you realise that the Dutch had enough romance to build Albany very near the traditional birthplace of the great hero and founder of Iroquois civilisation, Hiawatha?"

She told him frankly that she had not known this, and thereby gave him another pleasure. What man ever fails to plume himself when a clever and beautiful woman acknowledges that he has taught her something?

"Yes, indeed! It was the West India Company, you'll remember, who saw the stupendous advantages of these river banks, and who gave certain rich men, Patroons—I like the old word—the prerogative to buy up land here and to exercise rights over it and the people who settled it for them. It was a tempting advantage, we'll allow! It really exercised a sort of feudalism. In fact," and again his imagination leaped to fill out his words, "Rensselaerwyck was nothing but the first attempt to found feudalism in America. But these liberty-loving mountains and the broad Hudson breathed their spirit into the heart of one young chap, Van Curler, who saved our nation from the taint of mediævalism! He persuaded the settlers to buy up from the Indians the great flat of Mohawk Valley. And so he opened a superb region to civilisation by founding Schenectady on principles of freedom."

His Indian reminiscences satisfied her old love of a story and added a local charm to her surroundings that refreshed her. Suddenly a great back-wash of homesickness rolled over her and she said abruptly, "Let's go back!" Calvin tooled his car about, and as if in full understanding of the change in her asked, "And how is Jerry?" She had been dreading the question. But now that it came so naturally she met it frankly with, "I'm worried about Jerry. He seems so strangely restless and overworked. He hardly sleeps at all—just studies till all hours and paces the rest of the night. I do not see how he has any vitality left to live on."

It was a long speech for her to make, Calvin reflected. She so rarely dwelt on her own troubles, or her happiness. He felt that she must be hard pushed to confide so much. "I've noticed it—it's deplorable," he said, sympathisingly. "I must

try to get him to take a little vacation! But he's so deucedly clever and ambitious, that it's hard to turn him."

She was grateful to Calvin that he had not substituted "headstrong" for "clever." His words, too, showed her that he had been expostulating with Jerry, himself. "I think he needs a rest, too, a perfect change. But we have been in Bentley such a short time—only four months, you know—that he will not ask for a vacation so soon."

"If you'll let me, I'll see what I can do about arranging it," he said eagerly. He had the gift of always seeming to be able to supply the lacking element. Moreover, his ability and alertness always supplemented his kind interest and made it achievement.

"I'd be so very grateful!" She turned her big sad eyes upon him, and he understood that she too, was in distress. "And now you may please take me home—fast," she said.

Returned, she went at once to the study, to find it still empty. But on the hall settle lay a plump letter from Sallie Howe, and she bent over it in benediction; there was someone left who never failed her in time of sore need. She ran upstairs, took off her heavy clothing and put on a house gown of mauve *crêpe de chine*. Then crouching down by her fireplace, in which the Swedish woman had made a blaze, grateful after the chill of automobiling, by the light of it she read:

"Dear Child:

"Your mother thinks of you these royal fall days as the happiest girl in all York State, playing with Jerry in your toy house and romping over the Palisades together. Thank you, I should love to come visit you next week—had such a good time my last visit. But father has a touch of his malaria, and I haven't the heart to leave him for long. One day I could get off, though. What day next week could you meet me for a spree in New York? My dear, here's a little 'sprise for you, the days when I might bring you gingerbread and candy being past—alas! You know I wrote you that we Jersey Wellesley girls had organised a Dramatic Society. Last week we gave 'Much Ado' at the Country Club, and as we

advertised that the proceeds were for charity, a goodly mob of the Jersey nobility turned out to support us. We made $200—great, wasn't it? Well, I being on the committee of appropriation spoke up for Jerry's church. I told them your parish is small, and immensely interested in foreign missions. And my dear, you would have been touched to see how the girls behaved. There's nothing quite like college free-masonry, after all! It all ended in a vote to send you this check, dear. I know you won't mind—it will give Jerry such pleasure! I can see him now leaping around the study in a spasm of enthusiasm.

"*Au revoir* and a heart full of love for the most perfect pair of lovers that I know.

"Always and devotedly,

"SALLIE."

Persis held the check nearer to the firelight, to verify its amount. It seemed too huge! Yes, there it was, $200, in Sallie's round, plain figures. And all for foreign missions! Well, it would give Jerry pleasure—and decidedly that was what came hard to Jerry at present. She longed to hear his step in the hall, and in her longing was mingled a shade of anxiety lest some accident had befallen him, to make him so late. She went down to the library and lit the big lamp. The warm tints of its shade glowed with a cheery sheen and glinted on bits of copper ornaments. Its light fell softly on the "Spring" maidens over the fireplace, whither Jerry had jokingly consigned them the day they had hung pictures together. Ah, Jerry seldom made jokes now—he was too irritable and depressed.

A quick turn of the front door-knob announced his advent. She hurried to meet him. "Oh, Jerry! I've worried so about you! Where have you been?"

"I—I'm not sure, dear. I started out to go for a walk over the hill with you. And when I came to myself I was three or four miles beyond the hospital, out on the old Albany Road."

"Came to yourself?" she repeated. "Are you so absent-minded that you lose your way in Bentley?"

"I am headachy and depressed and chilled through," he said shivering. "Won't you get me a cup of something hot, please?"

All her resentment, her anger and hurt pride, vanished with his appeal for needed refreshment: so primeval is a woman's instinct to feed and tend her returning lord. When she had arranged him comfortably before the fireplace, and fed him a cup of hot bouillon; when he had revived sufficiently from his chill and weariness to resume his pacing to and fro, she looked at him steadily, her gray eyes full of reproach and pain, and said, "Jerry, why didn't you wait for me this afternoon? I was so—so disappointed!"

"Forgive me, dear one, I forgot—forgot that you wanted to go."

She still looked at him, nonplussed, chagrined at the simplicity of his explanation. So this was his excuse, then, for breaking his engagement and hurting her feelings! There was nothing more for her to say, surely. The intensity of her feelings was so out of proportion to the paucity of his explanation! The wisest thing to do was to let the matter drop—accept it as a passing mischance. Had she, after all, been too exacting? Had she not magnified absent-mindedness into a misdemeanour? To be generous—to see the matter from the other person's viewpoint! That was the grace she must assiduously cultivate in dealing with Jerry. She recalled how generous Calvin had been in giving Nellie the benefit of the possibility of not having received his telegram. And putting aside her expectancy of restitution from Jerry, she produced Sallie's letter, and with all her charm and sweetness said, "Just guess, Jerry, what Sallie has sent you for a surprise!"

"A box of cigars! The little one is the only girl of my acquaintance who is intelligent enough to know a good brand of cigars when she sees it."

"No."

"A new necktie! The last time I saw her I warned her that all of mine were worn out."

Persis recalled the relays of neckgear reposing in his top bureau drawer, and the several dizzy ones she had from time to time abstracted, to the high pleasure of the ash-man. But she merely said, "No. It's a surprise for your foreign missionary society," handing him the check and explaining how Sallie had gotten it.

She had expected a demonstration of joy. Instead he frowned. "Oh, I thought it was for me," he said. Then his mood shifted till it resembled untouched farness, and a crafty light came to his eyes. "You had better keep it. Put it in your writing desk—till you see Miss Atwood. And now may I have my dinner, please?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE next Monday afternoon Persis curled up amongst the pillows of her south window-seat with her copy of the "French Revolution." All the morning she had found her houshold duties too light to keep her attention—with Jerry locked in his study, refusing meals and sociability, there was left so little to do! As for Carlyle—there must still be the grace left in her to lose herself in the great deep current of affairs that made and unmade human destinies and hushed epochs with the turn of a hand or the glance of a blade. But her restlessness drove through the regions of intellect down into the deeps of her spirit; and no mental exercise protected her from anxiety and herself. A dark, persistent foreboding of something unhappy and ill shadowed the pages that she turned irregularly. Finally she closed her book, and gazing out across lots, gave herself up to her prescience, hoping that a phantom faced was a phantom vanquished. She asked herself if she actually were on the brink of some calamity, or merely the prey of over-wrought nerves? What were these haunting fingers of premonition pointing to? Jerry had gone into sort of a voluntary "retreat" behind the locked door of his study. It was a new habit of his, this locking himself in! Was he so fearful of interruption from her? She at least had not been so dull as to miss the significance of a guardedly closed door—that humiliation she had spared herself. The days and weeks of her own solitariness testified that she knew how to respect Jerry's desire for it. Just at this unhappy stage of her ruminations, the door-bell rang. Disturbed by the idea of having to adapt herself to callers, then glad of any kind of friendly intercourse, she waited eagerly for the Swedish woman to

bring up two cards, on one of which was engraved in the latest fashion of block letters, "Mrs. Calvin Darrach," and on the other, in very precise script, "Miss Complaisance Atwood."

So Nell had come home Saturday night—had returned to her husband's "bed and board." Persis recalled the odd phrase, and her first acquaintance with it: she and her mother, in an extremely bucolic district of New England, were visiting some mysterious and pastoral relatives, long since gathered to their worthy rest. With a young girl's faculty for spying out the singular and hidden, underneath the old worn family Bible on the sitting-room table, she had found a certain copy of a two-sheeted local newspaper, which had obviously been tucked away for some content of treasured intelligence. The outside of this newspaper was "made copy," a dummy of stale, scrappy jottings of indifferent import and interest, while the inside was overlaid with such informing items as that "Hiram Slocum was pasturing his two-year old colts on Pond Hill," or that "Jane Tuttle was spending a few days with Myra Oviatt." And down in the obscure left lower corner was the astonishing statement that "whereas Lucy Crandall, of her own intent and purpose, had wilfully left the bed and board of her lawful husband, Amasa Crandall, be it therefore known from this day and date that said Amasa Crandall did hereby give notice to all whom it might concern that hereafter he would in no wise be responsible for the board, clothing, bills or other obligations entered upon by the said Lucy Crandall." The awesome formula of renunciation ran through Persis's mind now with new significance, as Nellie's newest escapade made it more real.

She dallied another moment, and found her poise in the certainty that every bit of china on her tea-table was dusted—kind fortune had set her cleaning day! The whole first floor was in spotless order. She knew that Nellie had a positive affinity for dust and small deficiencies as well as a righteous

dread of both. They always attracted and horridly fascinated Nellie's over-exquisite sensibilities, as a magnet draws its own. With a little tug on her capacity for serene endurance, she descended to her callers. Ignoring the fact of Nellie's remarkable disappearance and happy return to Bentley, Persis greeted her first and pleasantly.

"You dear thing to be in!" Nellie exclaimed, kissing her hostess effusively. "I'm so charmed to see you looking so well!" Persis knew that people who are exceedingly unhappy seldom look well; moreover, she knew that Nellie Darrach had discerned her lapse from beauty and was making the most of it. "I've brought my very dear friend, Miss Atwood, to inspire you! I know you are both going to enjoy each other so much—you are both so interested in the poor and charities! Dear Miss Atwood, I hope you will be the source of inspiration to Mrs. Wadhams that you are to me."

Persis held out her hand, and usual words of greeting came to her readily. Heretofore, however, she had met Miss Atwood only at church sociables and missionary teas—at more or less long range.

Miss Atwood was a little mouse-coloured lady, with a croak in her voice. She was very susceptible to flattery and attention, and was apt to meet even small courtesy with an electrical display of response and endearment. At such times, and indeed at all times of high feeling, her croak became a warble. She owned most of Piety Hill and had donated the plots on which the parsonage and the church had been built. Indeed her father had owned most of Bentley. And yonder in the more populous part of the town, were factories and mills of his founding, the bulk of the stock of which lay in the hands of his sole heir and survivor. At rare intervals this lady could be persuaded to open her heart and her purse in the name of charity. She was known in local vernacular as "one of Bentley's most prominent citizens." She was president of the Be and Do

Society and the Fortnightly Club; and she aspired to the vice-presidency of the Village Improvement League. But to the ineffable relief of Calvin Darrach, who was its president, she had so far been compelled to subdue her aspirations to the popular vote for Elder Gaylord. Quite recently, with the coming of the new minister, she had been elected president of the foreign missionary society. This honour in part assuaged her defeat in favour of the Elder; she was, in truth, lifted up and carried away by the exaltation of her new cause. And people who knew the extent of her bank account and her monetary possibilities looked for great happenings on the foreign fields, as the counterpart of Miss Atwood's enthusiasm. So far, however, she held the Bentleyites in expectant and speculative uncertainty as to her missionary prowess, other than her zeal for making new converts. She had divided her town into districts and was systematically canvassing each: it was on such a beat that she and Mrs. Darrach had called on the minister's wife.

As Persis looked her over at close range, estimating her length and breadth and height, the dimensions necessary to fill the New England girl's idea of greatness, she saw in Miss Atwood her most formidable co-worker in church affairs. While her keen perceptions filtered in and through and around the personality of the president of the foreign missionary society of her husband's church, she felt herself grow vividly conscious of the individuality of a little woman, intensely wiry, nervously alive and alert, with thin anæmic lips and small eyes aglow with emotion. But above all else she felt her own utter inability to move in harmony with this leader of church work. A zealot, she told herself—a born zealot, with a soul outweighing her mind and body; and that soul centred and fed by the sentiments and possibilities of something she herself did not at all believe in.

"My dear Mrs. Wadhams! I am so thankful for this

opportunity of being here with you, intimately in your home! As I was saying to Mrs. Darrach on our way up here, there is nothing like being able to get at people in the very precincts of their own home influences—nothing so effectual as reaching them in the very shadow of their hearts' own idols, and thus showing them the blessedness of sharing their loaf with the godless of foreign climes. I've been looking forward to the time, dear Mrs. Wadhams, when you would offer us your deep interest and influence, your loyal support in this our vast, ennobling labour."

Her voice had now reached the pitch of warbling inflection, that struck Persis as a compound of cheeriness, enthusiasm, and affectation.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Wadhams, you don't realise how we need the inspiration of your presence, the impetus of your youthful enthusiasm, in our blessed labour for the benighted and misled heathen of other lands! Something tells me you *will* espouse our cause and make it your own, dear Mrs. Wadhams—that you *will* place it above everything else in your heart."

She paused, aglow and breathless with the logic of her own eloquence, while Nellie gazed on her with revered awe and admiration. It was such outpouring of fervent speech as this that had caused Nellie to recommend Miss Atwood to Persis as "brilliant and intellectual." In fact, throughout Bentley, Miss Atwood had the reputation of being "one of our most eloquent speakers."

However, Persis felt the need of stemming the tide of her own increasing disinclination, as well as of Miss Atwood's eloquence. "Thank you," she said simply. "You are very kind to offer me a place in your society. I shall want to understand the foreign situation thoroughly well. You see, I am almost entirely interested in the missionary problems right here at our own doors—in New York City, in fact."

"Ah!" Miss Atwood dwelt on the breadth of the vowel. "I am so encouraged to hear you say even this! Pray, won't you give us ladies of the parish some opportunity to hear your version of this side of the great problem, at an early date?"

Persis was seized with the fear that Miss Atwood was on the verge of asking her to give some kind of a lecture or a demonstration of "eloquence." Reinforcing herself with the privilege of the hostess to set the topic of conversation, she turned to Nellie with "I had such a good letter from Sallie, Saturday! Mrs. Darrach's cousin, Miss Howe, is my very good friend," she explained to Miss Atwood.

"Indeed?" this lady warbled.

"Sallie utterly ignores me," Nellie pouted. "It's months since I've heard from her! It's perfectly incomprehensible how she can treat me so neglectfully—her own cousin! With Calvin away so much, too, if I hadn't dear mamma to go to once in a while, I'd perish with neglect! Isn't it the oddest thing why Sallie doesn't have more opportunities to marry?"

As Persis made no reply to this inquiry, Nellie, refusing to stay reduced, went gracefully on. "I suppose Sallie is well, and that you two are planning to meet in New York—as always."

Nellie's tone implied a disgust of gadabouts. Persis ignored it and said, "Oh yes, indeed. We're going to the opera this week."

Whereupon Miss Atwood performed a strange feat. She started electrically, and shot her eyebrows up into the middle of her forehead—where they remained in distressed and mouse-coloured peaks. Persis wondered if Miss Atwood was of those who confound opera with theatres? And was she on the brink of catching the new minister's wife in a sin deadlier than indifference to heathens? Unmistakably it was high season for Persis to make a favourable impression. She summoned the grace so well within her call when she wished to be winsome, and turning to Miss Atwood with charming solicitude, said,

"Miss Howe sent us a splendid surprise! It gave my husband much pleasure, but I think it will please you more. If you will pardon my absence a moment, I will get it."

She smiled graciously and passing lightly upstairs, stepped to her desk. Unlocking the upper right hand drawer where she had put the check for safe keeping Saturday night, she found it gone. Nervous with this discovery, she began to scramble about aimlessly amongst her papers and letters. She even searched through two other compartments where she knew she had not put the check, and still perplexed, sat down to collect her scattered ideas. With lightning rapidity she went over the past forty-eight hours, and decided that Jerry must have taken the check and deposited it—it was made out in his name. But that he should have taken it without telling her—she put her slender hand up to her forehead to steady it through unpleasant speculations. She sat so, five minutes. Then she recalled her guests left alone in the parlour and the thought brought her back to calm reasoning.

So over the field she went again. The possibility of burglars flashed before her; but burglars on sedate, godly Piety Hill were as incongruous as comets in a coal mine. And beside, not another article in the house was missing or misplaced. Saturday night she had locked the check in her desk—she was no lunatic or irresponsible child, uncertain of what disposal she had made of two hundred dollars. Well, the check was gone! Sunday she had hardly seen Jerry, so busy was he with services and rendering last consolations to an aged parishioner. Returning from evening service belated and exceedingly nervous with his day's work, he had flatly refused to retire; far into the night she had heard his restlessness. That morning she had had his breakfast served in the study, early—and now the check was gone! Jerry must have it. Was it quite wise to disturb him by asking him about money matters? Decidedly not! The rational thing to do, then, was to go to the ladies,

explain, and present the check later. She went downstairs, and facing her guests, quite her serene self, began:

"The surprise Miss Howe sent was a check for two hundred dollars. Some of my classmates made this amount in their club work recently, and very generously donated it to my husband's church. There was some preference about it going toward the foreign mission fund, I believe. I had thought to hand you the check now, Miss Atwood, but I find that Mr. Wadhams has it with him in the study, and I do not disturb him at his work. I will mail you the check later in the day."

Miss Atwood clapped her mouse-coloured gloves together ecstatically. Her gray chenille boa squirmed off her shoulders on to the floor, as, bounding from her chair, she clasped Persis to her frail chest.

"My dear Mrs. Wadhams! the ineffable delight your announcement brings to me! I knew—I knew you were a convert to this larger, nobler cause—this magnificent service for the Master!"

She laid her little gray-bonneted head down on Persis's shoulder and shed evangelistic tears. Meanwhile Nellie had arisen, and producing a lace kerchief, wiped her eyes and gave two or three moist sniffs in one end of her ermine muff.

"So sweet of Sallie—so good of you, dear, to give dear Miss Atwood all this pleasure! It's such a relief, too, to find you on our side!" And she beamed triumphantly on Miss Atwood's embrace. "We must go now, Persis dear. We have seven more ladies on our list. Think of it—such a harvest for Bentley!"

Persis spoke some perfunctory words of detainment. "Oh, I must go," expostulated Nellie. "I always make it a point to be home when Calvin returns from a trip—if it's only from the office! Good-by, dear! I've had a delightful call." And she pecked daintily at Persis's cheek with her thin lips. Then arranging her ivory card case inside her muff, she linked arms

with Miss Atwood affectionately and together they minced down the hill.

Left to herself, Persis went to the study and rapped. Hearing no sound, she rapped again. Then dreading to try the door lest she find it locked, she waited. It had always given her an indescribable pain to feel that she stood outside of a door that shut her out of the biggest part of Jerry's life. But a fear that mastered her dread made her open the door, which let her into a room empty of Jerry. His desk was littered with papers, just as it had been Saturday, when she went to take him to walk. The breakfast tray that she had sent in to him early in the morning stood untouched where the Swedish woman had set it inside the door. Why had the servant not told her at once that Jerry was not in the study, she asked herself, in a rage with such colossal stupidity? Why had she not ascertained for herself, the next moment her reason amended? Why had she been so credulous and yielding when he had excused himself after the supper last night?

"I'm all right now, girl of mine, after your excellent meal," he had assured her, with one of his old quick smiles. "Don't worry about me—I'm not worth it! I shall work late to-night —I'm just finishing my thesis on the Insufficiency of the Conscience Alone as a Guide to the Inculcation of Truth and Righteousness. Truth and Right, darling! The only two essentials that will ever unify all our struggles for happiness, character, and creed!"

He had seemed in an exalted mood, dominated by lofty aspirations; so again she had let him overcome her better judgment. Ah, she should have seen to it that he retired and tried to sleep! But her dread of clashing wills with him, knowing the tenacity of both wills, had made her yield. Leastways, he had escaped her watchfulness, her ear so trained to catch every footfall that meant exit from the study—and he was gone. For the first time it came to her that he had been gone

longer than she realised. She recalled vividly every detail of the evening before—how when she had gone to the kitchen to give instructions for his early breakfast, she had heard him go upstairs; how a moment later returning to the library, she had found him standing there before the fireplace. Then he had urged her not to wait for him, had kissed her good-night, and retreated to his study.

After eleven o'clock she had retired, torpid with sleep, weary with the strain of anxiety. She had slept heavily, awakening once from old habit of listening for him. But a dense stillness lay over the little house and the only noise she heard was the whistle of the midnight train, southbound, as it pulled out of Bentley station. She had not awakened again till the Swedish woman had entered her room late the next morning, with a breakfast tray. Trays were this female's manner of disposing of breakfast in the easiest possible way; when the master refused to come to the table mornings and the mistress overslept, she served their food on trays—one downstairs in the study, one upstairs in the chamber! Queer goings-on, these! Strange young people to work for, these college couples, she told herself stolidly. But on the whole nice to wait on—especially the parson. Her devotion to Jerry was the best thing about her, and because of it, Persis had learned to tolerate the bulk of her dumbness. Jerry had found her somewhere on the East Side in lowly, hapless circumstances, and by his help and care of her sick husband, had made her his bondwoman. Seeing only her capacity for faithfulness, when he had started housekeeping he had imported her, thinking she would be the mainstay of his young and inexperienced wife; but in her heart the Swedish woman despised his wife, and could never understand how such a fine young gentleman could choose such a proud, hard girl.

Still striving to account for every hour of the recent past that hung so mysteriously around her, Persis reflected that, being so

well drilled in the art of avoiding the study, she had no precise knowledge of Jerry since last night. And now it was mid-afternoon, and she had just acquainted herself with her husband's non-whereabouts! Jerry was gone! That was the fact that blockaded all avenues of thought. The idea of his absence seized and held her in a vice. For the first time in her life she felt utterly, abysmally, stark alone. Here in the heart of her own home, encompassed by the tenderest, most endearing associations of her life, surrounded with objects she worshipped with a passion akin to fetishism—here, with Jerry gone, her sense of loneness swept down upon her in an avalanche of isolation.

From habit she started upstairs for her own room; but the force of her growing anxieties darkened down upon her till, as if from sheer physical inability to stand under their weight, she sank prostrate across the lower steps of the stairs, lying so, prone in the dust of her overwhelming fears. Impotence swept over her, rhythmical, actual. At last she crawled to her window-seat. The early winter night had begun to creep up the hill in the guise of great, murky shadows that stole into her room through the white muslin curtains. She recoiled from the night—its advance was so like the desolation creeping over her. She lit every gas jet in her room, hoping thereby to frighten away the growing gloom.

Resourceful, resolute, courageous, she had never before felt so entirely at a loss to know the best thing to do next. Whatever else she did, she must conceal from the parishioners and Bentley the fact that she did not know where Jerry was. Equally important, too, she must discover at the earliest possible moment his whereabouts, and put herself in touch with assurance of his safety. And lastly, she must find out where the check was, or whether Jerry had taken it with him. Three things to do! Methodical, logical, trained in detail by her college life and hospital service, she determined to deal with her

problems in order. But where to turn? How to begin? Who to help her? Instinctively she thought of Calvin Darrach. He was kind and strong and wise. Surely he would find Jerry for her. But her pride and her reticence formed a bulwark against which her anxiety and her need of help beat themselves to an instant and senseless death. She must wait, she told herself—wait till circumstances defined her future conduct more clearly, or gave her some cue to act. Above all else she shrank from making Jerry's erraticism public, or making a conflagration of what was merely a bonfire. Perhaps he would return—any minute: Saturday, when she had grown exceedingly nervous about him, he had come home safely. Why torment herself unnecessarily? "He also serves who waits!"

Drawing the tabourette up to her desk she sat down, and taking her check-book, directed the First National Bank of Bentley to pay to the order of Miss Complaisance Atwood two hundred dollars ($200.00). Then she put the check in an envelope with a short note begging Miss Atwood to pardon this delay in the delivery of Miss Howe's gift, and sent the Swedish woman with it to the Atwood homestead. This was the easiest and the quickest way of despatching one *béte noir*, the beasts that with great green eyes stood staring into her heart. And a big wave of gratitude went up to the grandfather who had made it so easy for her to cancel unhappy indebtedness: it was the first time in her life that she had ever known the value of money.

When the Swedish woman returned Persis bade her make a big log fire in the library and to keep the dinner till Mr. Wadhams returned. She waited before the fireplace two hours, turning the pages of Thanksgiving magazines fitfully, trying to force herself to follow the text. She recalled the other Thanksgiving—could it be only three years ago? It seemed a decade! —when the Darrachs and Jerry and she had met at Sallie's.

And a poignant pain gripped her heart as she realised that the only obvious and great change in them all was in Jerry. Would she never be able to shake off this premonition of ill? Perhaps it was that she needed food.

She ordered dinner served, and sat down alone at the head of the table. She was quite accustomed to taking her meals alone—of late Jerry had eaten so spasmodically. But she was astonished to realise how much larger and drearier the table looked with Jerry gone, than with Jerry writing in the study. If she had had any idea of how empty the dining room looked, she would have telephoned the Darrachs to come and dine with her. Ah—but how to explain Jerry's absence? Nellie was possessed of an acute, sixth sense for a "situation" among her married friends, and was keen on the scent of any marital chase—especially unhappy ones. She kept a sort of an accountantship over matrimonial tiffs and episodes, from which she deduced astute and oftentimes diabolically correct deductions about her friends. Nothing gave her a keener zest in life than to find an ocasional check, seemingly made out in good form, but marked across the face "no funds." It proved to her own high satisfaction how common these little dissensions between men and their wives were, and how admirably, on the whole, she was managing her own husband.

A scanty meal: such a poor tribute to the Swedish woman's cooking that she resented it with a sniff, as she removed the untouched dishes to the kitchen. She had never understood why a woman as thin and pale as the minister's wife, and who had a husband able to provide food for her, should show such indifference to what she ate. Again Persis took up her wait by the fireplace. Almost immediately a step sounded on the piazza, and radiant, alive with the expectancy of finding Jerry on the mat, she glided to the door. Instead, a worn man of middle life, in the clothes of a labourer, with grief-stricken eyes and seamed face, stood there before her. He clutched off his

wool cap, stepped into the hall, and inquired if "the parson" lived there. Noting his appearance of affliction, how inadequate to the chill November night his clothing was, she bade him stand before her fire.

"Seems like troubles never comes to us kind in singles." He addressed her in dull, sullen voice, out of which every note of hope had died. She began to wonder what she could do for him, what he wanted? She could not remember ever having seen him before, but the nurse's instinct was alert in her. "Last summer I lost me two youngest childer with bowel trouble. The doctor saed th' milk had pizened 'em. Then me wife, she tuk sick—th' wurry an' th' care wuz too much fur 'er. She wuz up so late o' nights nurs'n' 'em."

His words were touchstones. Here was somebody else suffering because his best-beloved was worn out with sleeplessness. Instinctively she went nearer him. She placed a chair before the fireplace. "Sit here," she said. "Now tell me all about it."

"Thur hain't much left t' tell. She died last month. An' naouw me oldest darter, a fine slip o' a gurl comin' fourteen an' all I got left, is dyin' o' diptherier. She sez she can't pull through th' night," he added sullenly. "I cum daoun th' hill t' see if th' parson would go back wi' me. She keeps a-askin' fur 'im, saying' his preechin' done 'er such a heap o' good."

The man paused, gazing into the blaze with a sulky stare of hopelessness. "I hain't much fur religun, meself," he went on. "Lost all me faith in it when me family wuz tuk frum me. Parsons hain't much use in a time like this, I guess," he added, tolerantly. "But me gurl, she keeps a-askin' fur 'im. Be you the parson's wife? D' yu' think 'e would go back wi' me an' say somethin' kind-like t' 'er?"

He put the question with a blank indifference, but Persis realised how much the fulfilment of this, his child's last wish, must mean to him. She longed to be able to step to the study

door and bring Jerry: the errand of mercy magnified itself to her because of her helplessness to achieve it.

"I'm so sorry to have to tell you my husband isn't home. He went away." Her voice trembled. "He will be so distressed to know he missed this chance to comfort your daughter. Isn't there something I can do? Wouldn't you like to have me go home with you?" she asked it eagerly.

The man looked her over stolidly and with brutal truth replied: "No—I guess not. She wouldn't know yu' if yu' went."

His biting commentary on her past conduct as a minister's wife made her wince: the poor of Jerry's parish should know her and be willing to accept her in time of need. What had side-tracked her so?

"Gone, is 'e? That's jest my idee uv a parson—off som'ers when yu' need 'im. Wal, I must be a-goin' back to me darter. P'r'aps b' th' time I git up th' hill she'll be dade."

He bent over toilfully and picked up his cap from the floor where he had laid it beside his chair, and with grimy, seamed hands fixed it securely on his grizzled head. She asked him where he lived—surely there must be something left she could still do.

"Know th' corn patch 'alfway up th' hill? Wal, wot's left uv us lives in a leetle shanty jest beyent. I mus' be a-goin' naouw. Goo'-by."

She opened the door for him and he stumped off into the night. Did she know the corn patch? And surely the shanty was the one she thought of hiding in Saturday to prevent Calvin Darrach from overtaking her. But morning should see the father with comforts. Late at night she heaped ashes high over the half-burnt log, and dismembering the rambling coals on the hearth, went up to bed. And being a well-poised individual, a girl trained from babyhood under the tutelage of the god Self-Control, and moreover possessing as yet the full

power of plasticity, that peculiar right of the healthy young, she slept—slept by force of habit and health.

And she dreamed that once she was walking through a beautiful forest, in joy of estate, when suddenly a hidden hand from rearward hurried her on past sunny leafage and bright flowers, yielding a threatening safety on the brink of a precipice, beyond which murky bedeviled waters seethed. And just as the domineering hand was plunging her headlong into the wet blackness below, Jerry, with his boyish smile of reassurance, bore her back to fragrance of forest depth, in the might of his youth and love.

With the smile of dream-bliss still on her lips she awoke and put out her hand to Jerry. But the linen pillowcase was unwrinkled and very chill to her touch. Tremulous, incited, she lay listening, peering into the night. She wished that she had left the gas burning ever so lowly, for company. The only sounds she heard were the rhythmical wind gusts soughing through the old pine tree standing on guard just outside her window, and her own heart-beats reverberating through the silent spaces of the little house. The only message they told her was of solitude and watching. She relaxed her body in a position of rest, fitting herself into the indentations of her bed and pillows with wilful comfort. And after two hours of insistent relaxation she felt her sensibilities sinking into quiet once more. Then "god-given sleep" returned to her, carrying her through the remaining night hours, far into the morning.

CHAPTER XIV

REFRESHED by consecutive hours of sleep, a bath and breakfast, Persis sat down in her window-seat to watch for the postman. It was time she heard from Jim Kimberley about the hunting lodge—and there might be a message from Jerry. She knew intuitively that he was not in the study, and spared herself the pain of looking there. Summoning the Swedish woman, in very explicit terms she established with her the fact that Mr. Wadhams would be out of town for a day or two. This was a broad, safe margin, she told herself, one calculated to settle any speculation that might be going on under the woman's dull exterior.

With the established habit of substituting work for worry, she began to busy herself with household duties. But with Jerry gone, what duty was left? Doubled back again on the path of her love, she lost her way in distress—so much louder was the call of her heart than the call of her brain. Then it came over her that the day was Tuesday, that day after to-morrow would be Thanksgiving. Of course, Jerry would be home Thanksgiving! She went to her desk and made out her menu—all the things that Jerry liked. The hospitable Sallie had invited the Darrachs and the Wadhamses to spend the day in Jersey; but she and Jerry had declined, preferring to keep the day in their own home. Then she remembered the sick girl up by the cornfield; here was some one right at her door-steps, who needed her. She went down to the kitchen, and sending the Swedish woman for a basket, began to collect bits of food, fruit, and a bottle of milk.

On her way out, she passed a bowl of Chinese lilies on the point of bloom and sitting in the library. Their tall lancet

leaves cleaved cobble and water, oblivious of plant need of earth, and their flower-stalks expanded momently to rapid bloom. She set down the basket, and taking the bowl in her gloved hands, steadied it against the wall while she opened the study door. Softly, from the habit not to disturb, she put the lilies on Jerry's table. They were his favourite flower; often she had heard him say that could he choose modes of growth, self-realisation, maturity, death, he would be like the Chinese lily: grow, blossom, and mature rapidly, and then pass on. If he should return while she was with the sick girl——

The frosty air revived her like a tonic. On the north side of the pumpkins in the cornfield rime glinted like diamond dust, but on the roadside a sullen, sallow sun was dulling the edge of the hubs to a muddy ooze. Presently she reached the ramshackle shanty, one corner of which sagged dejectedly, while a tattered bit of dingy mosquito net tacked to one window frame, flapped rhythmically in the crisp breeze that turned the north corner of the hut. The chimney exhaled frail puffs of pale smoke spasmodically, as if it had swallowed its missing bricks and choked the breath of the puny fire below. She rapped three times before she entered a low, disorderly, squalid room, in the middle of which sat the man who had called on her the night before. His chin rested on his breast, his thin legs stretched out far into the room, and his arms dangled limply by his sides. Near him, on the floor, stood a bottle, and the pungent fumes of whiskey on the close air made a swift diagnosis of his case.

"Good morning," she said, hoping his lethargy was that of despair rather than of alcoholism. "How is your daughter?"

He roused himself, stared at her unknowingly, and said bluntly: "She's dade." Then as if he had recognised her he added: "She's in yander."

He pointed to a second room, and through the half-closed door, Persis saw a young figure on a tumbled bed, frail contour

outlined by the thinness of a patchwork quilt, one corner of which partially covered the face.

"Were you alone with her when——"

"I wuz," he growled.

"No wonder you turned to whiskey," she said, the details of his night growing in her consciousness.

"I hain't tuk whiskey to dround me grief—I wuz ust to watchin' me family die off," he said with a show of bravery. His mental processes at first dulled, he was passing into the next stage of his intoxication, talkativeness. "I tuk a nip becuz I wuz hungry. Sence she tuk seck I hain't had nobudy to cook fur me. I wuz tu bizy nurs'n', meself."

His voice ended in a dull growl, and he relapsed into torpor again. She stepped nearer to him, and hoping to rouse him before complete lethargy, said in a voice as loud as she could find: "I've brought you some food. Take this beef sandwich."

He stared at her offering indifferently, making spasmodic and unsuccessful efforts to draw his legs up under him. Then he turned his head obliquely, ogled her, and with a silly leer said, "A man wat's full o' whiskey don't want no food, lady." And drowsiness drenched him.

Recalling her experience with alcoholism at the General Hospital, she knew that if she had met this man in the wards the last thing she would offer him was food. Remembering how she had failed with Jerry's case, she asked herself bitterly if all her old skill had left her?

Returned home, she peered into the study. Finding it empty she turned to the telephone in the hall, hoping to catch Calvin, Bentley's health officer, before he left for New York. Often he did not go to business till eleven o'clock, because Nellie claimed part of his day for herself. He often gave her morning hours, and worked till late at night to pay for it. Having arranged with him for the disinfection of the shanty,

Persis turned back to household cares for distraction; as she pulled every article out of her desk (well on the lookout for the missing check); and as she emptied the contents of her bureau on her bed and arranged them in uncomfortable order, it came to her that Calvin had not asked for Jerry. That he was sparing her the discussion of her husband over the telephone she felt sure.

Presently she found herself without employment again; she had tried to read and was ruining her embroidery with mis-set stitches. Then a kind thought saved her—Jerry wanted a new Harvard sweater. She would knit him one for a Christmas present! She ran to the telephone and found a clerk at one of Bentley's shops who knew the exact colour and quality of yarn. An hour later a messenger boy brought her purchase to her, and she sat all the rest of the forlorn afternoon "casting on" and "ribbing" stitches, glad of a piece of work that did not play out constantly. About half past four, when the long shadows of the November evening began to dull her needles, she dressed in her house gown and went down to the library to knit.

In the library she found a part of the code of home life that Jerry and she had made: every day at about five o'clock they had a fire built on the library hearth. To Persis the pleasantest sound in her home was the jangle of the copper tongs against the andirons, and the rustle of newspaper, as the Swedish woman crumpled it in her massive hands and tucked it amongst the kindlings. The crackle and snap of dried wood sounding through the quiet little house was their angelus. Meeting at the foot of the hall stairs, they made the hour before dinner a silence or a converse, as their moods regulated, with nothing to disturb them but the copper-gray shadows beyond the reach of firelight.

As she kept the hour now, alone with her knitting, a buoyant little hope kept telling her that perhaps Jerry would come in to keep the tryst with her. But the hour passed, and remembering that it was Tuesday, she sustained her hope by the thought

that surely Jerry would return for prayer meeting. He was so very punctilious about all his church appointments: he had not missed one such since coming to Bentley. Thus cheered, she ate a good dinner, the first meal she had enjoyed in two days. Then laying out her wraps on the hall settle, to be all ready to go to prayer meeting with Jerry when he came, she sat down and waited—another hour. The little church bell chimed out on the frosty night, and later she heard the footsteps of the good people hurrying past on the way to the conference room. But no step approached her door, and fanciful as to the consternation of the pastorless flock, she spent the next hour in rapid speculation about their attitude—the attitude of Elder Gaylord, for instance. Should she not have telephoned the Elder about Jerry's absence, before the meeting? The time was fast approaching when the parish would expect and merit some explanation of the non-appearance of their pastor.

Four minutes past nine Elder Gaylord presented himself at the parsonage. "We-a bretheren of the church were much nonplussed by our pastor's failure to-a lead us in prayer to-night." The elder held out his chilly fingers in greeting. His pause invited explanation. The minister's wife placed a chair for him where he could gather warmth from the fireplace, and for herself chose one on the other side of the library table. She knitted serenely.

"Yes indeed, Mr. Wadhams was unable to join you this evening. It is the first time he has been deprived of that privilege since he came to Bentley, is it not?"

"Exactly—beyond doubt—exactly!" Elder Gaylord stroked his thin beard, cleared his voice, and waited for his pastor's wife to proceed. But she showed no sign of offering further explanation; minutes sped on, and he proceeded himself.

"It-a—does it-a occur to you that your husband should have notified us of his-a prolonged absence from town, in which-a case we might have provided some one in his place?"

She grew a shade paler about the lips. She slipped a stitch, and while she was bending over to recover it, she replied, "Beyond any doubt in my mind, Mr. Gaylord, that would have been an expedient thing to do."

Followed another silence. The Elder cleared his throat again, blew his nose, and gave a nervous "Quite so—quite so!" He hitched about in his chair. "Do you-a—could you-a tell me in a somewhat more or less definite statement—give me an idea as to-a the exact time you expect your husband home?"

He eyed her with pin-point concentration of pupils, and fidgeted with his silk hat, which he kept in his thin lap. It was exceedingly unpleasant to be thus placed on the stand to bear witness against one's own husband, with Elder Gaylord's keen sensibilities, already sharpened by recent wrangles with Jerry, sitting as jury. But she answered him quietly enough. "At this moment it would be impossible for me to make a positive statement as to the hour Mr. Wadhams will return. He may be detained by unavoidable circumstances—for quite a while yet." She decided to set a broad margin while she was giving out the news the parish stood eager for.

"Quite so—ahem! When your husband does return, Mrs. Wadhams, will you-a kindly acquaint me of the fact by-a the telephone?"

"That I certainly will do—with pleasure! Is there not something else I can do for you while Mr. Wadhams is away?"

"No-a—I thank you! Perhaps not. I bid-a you good evening, Mrs. Wadhams, good evening." And Elder Gaylord took his searchingness down the hill, as wise as when he came up.

She remained standing in the posture she had assumed to receive his good-night addresses. Although she had taken the interview with unflinching nerve, her proud spirit had received a severe blow, which brought its reaction. She began to pace to and fro, till she wondered if she had caught Jerry's habit? She at least was getting a taste of the inner commotion

that compels mortals to bodily expression of it. Before she had time to pace far, a steady, regular tread sounded on the piazza, and Calvin Darrach, after a perfunctory rap, let himself into the hall.

"I thought the bell might jangle on your nerves," he explained. "It's a detestable way of announcing that you have come to help a friend."

She turned to meet him, divided between her relief at his presence and her desire to hide her perturbation from him. She held out her hand in greeting, and Calvin noticed that it was as cold as her face was white. He knew that some recent ordeal had sent her blood to her heart, and that her heart was aching with an anxiety that defied her tight lips a much longer concealment. She stood mute, motionless, except for the tremulous hands. Of all our members brought through civilisation into the bondage of self-control, our hands are the last to be subdued; they alone reveal most truly our emotions, and to eyes skilled in reading the outward expression of inner stress, they often give away secrets of feeling that the lips and eyes and body guard jealously as personal trusts. When Calvin had so impulsively presented himself, she had paused on the Shirvan rug before the hearth. Up as far as her knees the wide warm flicker from the fireplace threw bright shadows on her light gown and dwindled off into a soft flutter that played over the regularity and pallor of her face. He noted both of these facts, mentally sounding the deeps of feeling below her quiet, marvelling at the calm of a woman so hard pressed. He reflected that if her thin hands, interlocked and dropping at arm's length down the front of her gown, had not laced and interlaced their nervous fingers, she would have been statuesque.

He did not wait longer for her bidding to lay off his coat, but tossed it across the hall settle. In her pacing before his entrance she had pushed aside her chair from the fireplace. He

now replaced it for her and with deferential gesture invited her to sit. When she had done this, not without the sign of an effort that seemed the counterpart of her inward inability to unbend, he drew up a chair for himself on the opposite side of the hearth. As he sat down, cross legged, his powerful arms folded over his chest, his head slightly bent forward, he gave an unconscious sigh and for the first time she noticed how worried he looked. He saw that she was divining his anxiety, and tried to retrieve his give-away by saying cheerily, "How delightful your fire is! It's good to rest here a little while."

With her old response, she relaxed at the suggestion of his word "rest," unlocking her tense hands and settling back in her chair with a sense of physical relief. "It's a frosty one outside," he went on with easy inconsequence. "Saucy little clouds are scudding out the northwest like a flock of belated wild geese! Our celestial clerk is fixing to give us a dose of genuine old Bentley wind storm." He kept on passing over the fact that she had not yet spoken to him. Calvin had the gift of passing over the small omissions of life, or else of putting the best construction on them, which is an equally safe and happy line of conduct. Then his voice took on a softer, more intimate shade, as he said, "I want to thank you for ferreting out that awful case this morning. I actually believe you've spared Bentley an epidemic of diphtheria! It was brave of you to go in with food for the father. Had you no fear of contagion?" He had directed her out into the old fields of experience so skilfully that she felt she could speak at last.

"No, I never fear contagion: fear predisposes us to diseases more surely than anything else. And beside, I walked back in the sunshine." Then she added, as if by her contribution to the circuitous talk, "I'm going again to-morrow with food for the poor man."

"You're always kind," he said.

Something obstructed her throat. When she had swallowed

it, she replied mildly, "Don't be too good to me—to-night. I couldn't bear it, you know."

It was the first time she had ever said anything intensely personal to him: she had always held him off so, at arm's length. She was so remote. Despite his long and ill-concealed admiration of her, she had never given him the opportunity to suppose that whatever he said to her meant anything more than the passing exchange of courtesy. She had always seemed to him so non-impressionable to casual masculine attenton. Countless times in the three years he had observed her, at the turning points of her sudden and unexpected bits of self-revelation, he had told himself that he had never met a woman so entirely in love with her husband, so oblivious or indifferent to the effect she produced on any other man. Now, somehow, he felt that her last remark was one of the finest compliments a woman had ever paid him. He felt his own opinion of himself enlarge. And proud of his promotion, quick to take advantage of it, he took the step forward in their friendship, as a man who admires a woman always does, when she permits him advances.

Mindful of the great tax upon her proud, reserved spirit that any confidence about her husband would be, and above all else conscious that he was the only person in Bentley who could best serve her in the great need of help that was daily crushing in upon her, he ignored her confession, and went on charmingly, "Nell was on the point of coming to see you with me, but her horror of grippe overcame her neighbourliness. She sent you her love, though, and will try to come to-morrow."

Then she noticed that although he had presented himself with the announcement that he had come to help her, he had not yet referred to Jerry. Therefore he knew the cause of her great disquietude, her solitariness in Bentley, and was waiting for her to suggest the form that his help should assume. It was like his fineness, she thought: some men, however kindly, would

have bungled conditions by their loud demonstrations of help, and so rendered a situation already delicate, awkward and disastrous.

Assuring, guiding her up to the point of confiding in him was the knowledge that Jerry regarded him as a good friend. They had progressed by jumps and bounds to this fellowship, in the early autumn when each had discovered the other's love of hunting. All through October they had stolen many an hour from their business routine for happy jaunts in Calvin's car, afternoons of good comradeship and sport with their shotguns up in the Catskill region. So why shouldn't she tell Calvin about Jerry's strange disappearance? Aside from the immense relief of sharing the burden with someone as wise as Calvin, would it not be well to have somebody in Bentley, somebody connected with the church and affectionately disposed to Jerry, know the truth about him? So with painful breaking away of the barriers around her heart, she began her task of confiding. And Calvin waited for her, like the knight he was.

Her beginning was, "To-morrow is day before Thanksgiving." But the platitude jarred on her own ears, as too trivial to be palmed off on a good friend. Eager to help her out when the right time came, he turned toward her, hooking his right elbow over the corner of his chair-back, the fingers of both hands interlaced across his chest.

"Sallie has invited us all to dine with her again. That was a fortunate day for us Wadhamses when we met you—and Nellie," she added, too obvious a tribute to courtesy.

He smiled down upon her reassuringly. Poor child! How she must be suffering to make such hard work of it!

"Do you know—sometimes—" her voice caught and she shut her teeth down on it—"sometimes I'm afraid Jerry won't come home to spend Thanksgiving with me."

A sob passed over her, but she shook it off and went on. "He's gone—off, somewhere—I don't even know where he is."

With the costly words she bent her head down on her hands, and Calvin felt that her suffering was double in that she had confessed her ignorance of her husband's whereabouts. The firelight danced across her classic hands, accentuating her wedding ring and the whiteness of her knuckles through clenched fingers. And presently great hot tears splashed down into her lap. The deep springs of her feeling did not issue from the surface of her nature: she rarely cried, and never snivelled or wept a few cold tears to assuage emotion. When she cried at all her tears came from the bed rock of feeling; and it was in this fashion that she wept now.

With the big, sheltering impulse of the tender-hearted male being in the presence of a frailer suffering creature, he longed to shield her, longed to take her in his arms and hold her so, till her anguish subsided. But instead he unfolded his fresh handkerchief and laid it on her lap. Then he waited for her calm again. She raised her face from his offering at last, and turned away from him like a shy child found in tears, her profile against the gray shadows on the wall, while Calvin reflected on the damnable gossip going the rounds of the village and brought to his ears by some one at the boarding house who had just returned from prayer meeting. Strange antics for a minister and a bridegroom, to leave his wife without a word of explanation, Bentley was saying.

When her sobs stopped and her hands lay at rest on her lap, he felt that the time had come for him to speak. "Do you know, I think Jerry went away because he is not well." Then he tried to repair his frankness by adding, "Not dangerously sick,—only heart-sick! Depressed, and that off-the-track feeling, you know. I've noticed lately that he hasn't been himself. 'Tisn't like a man to be so damnably suspicious of everybody—on the lookout for trouble all the while."

It was his turn to make her wait. He wanted to see how she met his remarks, to divine just how much of her husband's

condition she comprehended. But of course she met them with complete serenity, wondering, however, if Calvin, too, had collided with some of Jerry's irritabilities, to make him speak so hotly of them now?

He went on, "I think his idea in going off so unceremoniously was to rest—that he did not tell you, lest you worry."

She flinched at this, and he hurried on, defending his friend from the standpoint of masculinity. "Of course, it would have been a thousand times easier if he *had* told you and let you go with him, to take care of him. But when a man is half sick, and dreads to worry the woman he loves, he doesn't stop to get her view of the situation. Jerry is a mighty impulsive chap, anyway. Probably he's off somewhere trying to get well enough to be a pleasure to you. I predict that you'll hear from him soon. And as for Thanksgiving—there isn't a doubt in my mind about his hailing in." Made bold by her silence, he added, "If he doesn't, you must go down to Sallie's with Nell and me."

Now was the time to provide for alternatives, he told himself. He felt that she might fail to see that in every predicament there is always some one way to turn—albeit not the desired way. So she quite surprised him by her tack. "What if Jerry should return and found me gone—the house empty and no Thanksgiving cheer? No—I must wait till he comes! If he doesn't come to-morrow, I shall telegraph him."

This sounded expedient: they both passed over the difficulty of her knowing where to send a telegram. Moreover Calvin revived a picture of his recent return to uninhabited rooms, and spontaneously agreed with her that her place was home. The thought of his own apartment suggested Nellie, her nervousness and hurt at his absence, his speedy return to her, sidetracking any plan for helping Persis, although he came with distinct intent to help.

He arose, towering above her, marvelling at her total freedom

from any resentfulness toward her husband. Her quietude under suffering appealed to him far more than words could have done. He longed to tell her how his heart ached for her, and gazing down upon her, was struck anew with her beauty. It was as if he saw her sitting there in the glow of the fireplace, for the first time, shed of her pride and her majesty, all her small correctnesses that hid her real, live self. He rejected in her all but the finer elements of her being, the perfect mould of her outlines, the exquisiteness of her pallor, the blur of her misty eyes, and the beautiful submissiveness of her spirit.

A little while ago he had wanted to take her in his arms because she was suffering, because she was frailer than himself. There had been in the impulse something impersonal, something of the regard of the strong for the weak. Now he longed to take her in his arms because she was the most beautiful woman he had ever known. And in this new impulse there was nothing of the kindly, the comforting, the impersonal. But—there were reasons, obvious, myriad reasons, why he must keep his hands off her! So as his only alternative he bent over and fixed the fire for her—an unnecessary homage, since the blaze already burned fervently.

"I must go now—Nell will wonder about me!" he said, as if something tugged at his energy. "Don't get up—rest there, just as you are."

He stepped to the hall for his top coat, bringing it back to put it on by the fireplace. He glanced at the telephone, inquired if the Swedish woman was in. "I shouldn't like to feel that you were stark alone up here. Telephone me if you need anybody. And be your own brave self—just for another night! Promise me you will try to sleep."

She glanced up at him with a smile that despite its wanness was very sweet. Again he tried to pave the way to rest for her. "Remember that a man on the centre rush at Harvard can take care of himself anywhere! I'll tell Nell to come and sit with

you a little while to-morrow. And now good night—and good courage!"

He bent over her, offering his hand, and as she took it something of his strength and optimism passed into her. And stopping only, after he had gone, to prod life out of the fireplace, she hurried upstairs before fear could clutch at her garments again, and putting aside the troubles that so readily beset her, resting partly on Calvin's assurance that Jerry was safe, partly on her own hope, still intact, that all would go well with him, she yielded to her sense of great weariness, and slept heavily till morning.

Her day dissolved into three or four elements, which she manipulated and reversed and alternated till they grew into another eighteen hour stretch. After the postman had passed, leaving her no message, she turned to the question as to whether or not she should order a Thanksgiving dinner. It would be dreadful if Jerry returned and she had no festive dinner for him: it would be very wasteful (her New England instinct for thrift and economy was still exuberant) if she ordered a lot of food and there was no one to eat it. So she ordered half-heartedly, scantily—not at all in accord with her original conception of their first Thanksgiving at home. Then there was the poor man in the shanty to be provided for—and the rest of the time there was knitting.

During the night a light cover of snow had fallen, just enough to sear over the face of the earth, and make it look wan and ill. She wondered whether, had she been in a happy mood, the ground would not have looked beautiful with its new holiday countenance. As she took the hill road with two days' provision in a basket on her arm, the sun came out cheerily; the exercise and the errand appealed to her, and she found her spirits pitched in a less excruciatingly shrill key. Had she passed over the frontier of fear, struck the farther border of worry, and bounded back on a path that seemed dull and life-

less through her very familiarity with it? Leastways, she was not suffering acutely this morning, whereas every moment of yesterday had been like living a page out of a book of demonology. She even felt composed enough to knit. And to knit all day was precisely what she did do—and far up into the night, till her fingers ached and then grew numb, and her eyes smarted with the incessant flash of the big steel needles. She was like someone swimming hopelessly against a swift stream in a race with himself. Hour after hour, barely stopping to eat, she sat before the south window (where she could get the first, best view of Jerry, when he came) knitting sedulously, undisturbed in her solitude except for one telephone call. Nellie had crawled out of her "sick bed" to say that she was "awfully sorry not to be well enough to come up." Yes, she hoped to be well enough to go to Sallie's to-morrow. Was Persis well? What a blessing for a woman to own such a robust frame! She hadn't been out of her room for a week now—not even to see dear Miss Atwood.

Persis knew that this message was Nellie's way of fulfilling Calvin's request that she call on her; and equally well she knew that Nellie had a surpassing lust for details. She had seen her elaborately and half-dressed for the theatre, and despite habitual exhaustion and imminent invalidism, stand for fifteen minutes before her telephone, nagging at a nonchalant central for connection with the Bentley ticket agent; and then after an extensive and spirited discussion with this man over the inconsequent fact as to whether a certain train left Bentley at 12:01 or 12:02 P. M., resume her toilette preparations, chanting audible and ramified thought projections of this same railroad alternative; and at last arriving at the point where, unconvinced of the correctness of the agent's schedule, she held to her own first opinion of the train's departure, and thereby missed it by one minute. Bits of past dinner parties likewise flitted back to her; beginning with the soup course, she had

heard Nellie start an argument with Calvin over the probability as to whether some trifling and past event in their domesticity had happened on Tuesday or Wednesday; and refusing to stay placated, string it along through the successive courses of the entire meal. And when each time Calvin had gallantly acceded her point, assuring her that beyond any doubt in his mind the event *had* occurred on Tuesday, she at inopportune and irrelevant moments, had rebounded to indistinct and distant lines of intricate circumstantial evidence, in order to prove to him that he was quite right in assuming that she was perfectly correct. To have had her turned loose upon her own dull, dumb, new mode of suffering, to have laid her sympathy open to the drain of Nellie's ailments and platitudes, would have rasped on her bruised nerves beyond the point of silent endurance. She was grateful, then, to the snow storm that had spared her such futile friendliness.

When trysting time came, her nervous fears arose again. She dropped more stitches and lost her bearings in the printed directions for the sweater. At last she stood up—to do something! She would telegraph Jerry—telegraph home for him. Then it came over her poignantly that he had no home except the one she made for him. He, too, was an orphan, and had spent his boyhood with an uncle and aunt now travelling. All his visits had been with her: they had meant so infinitely much to each other in their orphanage. Of all places he would have gone to Jersey—he loved the Howe hospitality. But in this case, within five minutes of his arrival, Sallie would have telephoned.

So her logic conquered her blind impulse to telegraph, and drifting again on the open sea of infinite and bewildering possibilities, her reason piloted her back into the harbour of patience. Moreover, she imagined how exceedingly awkward it would be to send any telegraphic messages of inquiry about Jerry from Bentley, because it would give away the fact that she did not know his whereabouts and was on the still hunt

for him. Within an hour the bit of news would be flashed into every cranny of the little, busy-body town. The only dignified and wise conduct was to wait. "He also serves who waits." She caught up her knitting once more, and soon her whole being was reduced to a revolving mass of sensations that communicated with the exterior order of things chiefly through the sense of hearing—the click, click, click of her steel needles playing a swift accompaniment to "he also serves who waits."

By and by, when her arms ached too much to hold the bulky sweater, she collected a pile of magazines, and lighting a china lamp with violet decorations that matched her room, she tried to read. On, on, into the night she pored over the pages, oblivious of the hours, the text, of everything except the dull, gnawing pain at her heart. At last her eyes closed, and when they opened again, the sombre grim lights of dawn were creeping up the wall. They made it look so unreal in the gloom, that she startled and looked about to learn what strange transformation had occurred while she slept. This new version of herself and her belongings was most disturbing. The little lamp had burned out its oil, and the charred wick gave an unpleasant, gaseous odour that sickened her. The gas still flared under full head above her couch, and mingled gruesomely with the dawn-light in a curious disharmony. Her magazine had slipped from her hand and sprawled on the rug in yawning proneness. The furnace fire was low; she was chilled, cramped from her unnatural sleeping posture, and depressed. She jumped up, and turning out the gas, raised one window shade.

It was the moment when night dies, confident, triumphant in its resurrection. Even as she watched the stars flickered, dwindled, went out. A moment of grim blank grayness in all the heavens, and then a slow emanation of light, as the sulky, sleepy winter sun gradually reflected the passing soul of the risen night.

Chilled as she was, the miracle of dawn thrilled her. She turned from it reverently, as we do from the presence of birth, and crept into bed to wait for the Swedish woman to open up the furnace. It was strange that she had fallen asleep: she had not meant to. She had meant to keep awake and watch for Jerry. Was this strange dawn thing finding him cold and dreary and alone, too? Perhaps he was ill somewhere—unconscious—in a hospital. How strange she had not thought of this before! Consumed by it, she reached for her slippers, and without waiting to put on other protection and with closed eyes to shut out the moroseness of early morning, felt her way along the banister, across the hall to the library. Gathering up the pile of New York papers that had collected, unread, for the past three days, she tiptoed back upstairs with them. And bolstering herself up in bed, she began a systematic search through every column for fatal street accidents, ambulance cases, and lists of unidentified, unconscious beings in hospitals. In time she came to the last edition, and the headlines on the front page told her abruptly that the day was Thanksgiving, while her heart told her that it was the first Thanksgiving of her married life.

CHAPTER XV

SHORTLY before ten o'clock of the holiday morning Calvin Darrach's voice over the telephone asked Persis to call him at the Howes' in case of emergency, promising "not to tell Sallie."

Through the kitchen door came savoury odours of sage and spices and pumpkin pies; with sickening hope she followed them up. The Swedish woman stood in her stubbedness before the kitchen table, her hardy cylindrical arms bared to the elbows, plunging broad handfuls of seasoned breadcrumbs into a cavernous turkey. "As soon as you can clear the kitchen you may have the rest of the day to yourself—we will not roast the turkey till to-morrow. You have been wanting to visit your son—now is your chance! Mr. Wadhams and I have made our arrangements for dinner." When she heard the solid footsteps disappearing along the path she returned to the first floor and drew every shade down to the window sill. She would at least have the satisfaction of holding Bentley gossip at bay as long as possible. Then she went to the second story and pulled all the curtains down likewise. The sun through the white shades of her own room would give all the light she needed. And all day long, through the festival hours of the would-be holiday, she sat alone with her knitting and her heartache, till a blister came on one slender finger, and physical pain compelled her to lay her work aside. But how the sweater grew, and how delighted Jerry would be with it Christmas!

Toward mid-day she crept downstairs again noiselessly, as if fearful of waking up echoes in the profoundly quiet little house. From the ice-box she brought enough food to make herself a scanty luncheon, and since the dining-room looked so

very big, she curled up in the wooden rocker before the range and nibbled her sandwich, grateful for the kitchen cheer. When she returned to her own room, stillness palled on her; and then again the farthest corner of the house would resound with loud myriad echoes of her slightest motion. The afternoon stretched out into æons of stagnant time. Once when she was a pupil nurse, deep in the fascinations of *materia medica*, she had tested all the drugs she studied by taking a dose of each of them. As she passed down the list of medicines alphabetically, coming to hasheesh, she had experienced its wonderful power to drag her through endless expanse of slow-going time. She recalled particularly one half-hour dinner period that had seemed a small eternity. She had finished her own meal slothfully, and sat on in half-amused, half-scornful oblivion to the progress of time, watching the others eat, wondering what the patients were doing for care while the nurses' endless repast dragged sluggishly by. Now time had become so static, that she wondered if, by some mysterious proxy, she were not again under the influence of hasheesh.

Since her fingers ached too much to knit, reading was the only antidote left to her. When the early twilight began to blur the outlines of her room, she remembered that a lighted gas jet would betray to Piety Hill the carefully guarded secret of her solitary watch. Surely a fire on the hearth would commit no indiscretion; but just to propitiate the spirit of caution in her, she hung two slumber robes over the window shades. Piling her couch pillows before the grateful light, she stretched out at full length on the hearth tiling, trying to warm and cheer herself in the friendly glow. From habit her heart craved the familiar setting of the library trysting place, although her nerves demanded the change of scene. As her mind roamed through the pages of "Alice in Wonderland," she knew that Alice's consternation at certain episodes was akin to her own at present experiences. Bewilderment seemed her ritual. The firelight

danced fitfully, and by and by the letters bobbed across the pages and hopped into the fire. So she propped her head in one hand, her elbow slanting on the hearth rug, and gazing into the flames, tried to draw shapes and fancies out of their fluttering glow, to read some omen of good in the flapping wings of the blaze, as a pagan priestess might augur future events by watching a flock of birds in flight.

She had almost lost her sense of the present in a maze of fancy when, for the second time that day, the silence quivered with the insistent ring of the telephone. Tremulous, alert with hope, she ran to answer it, and this time the voice that came over the distance was Sallie's.

"Hello—Persis! Just guess who's here—right beside me! No—not Cal—he took Nell home two hours ago. Fearing the effect of night air on her lungs, Nell, just after dinner, had begun to droop and pine for the balmy atmosphere of the boarding-house! No, she had not fainted this year. But guess who's here! Jim Kimberley—at last! Yes, bodily! Hold the line—I'm presenting him! My homely cousin Jim—Persis."

Persis heard a shuffle of feet; indistinct, low words. So the time had come when she was to meet Sallie's paragon man and arch-charmer, if not actually face to face, at least voice to voice. Her sensibilities quickened, as she recalled that after nearly four years of mystery, halting, parrying and bo-peeping, she was now *en rapport* with Jim Kimberley. And then her own name ringing over the wires startled her.

"Persis—at last!" The voice was full and manly, with a hint of foreign accent and a richness of tone that justified all Sallie had said about his gift of song.

"Mr. Kimberley—Sallie's fabulous, effervescent, ephemeral cousin at last embodied—in a voice! It's too good—too very good—to be true," she added, with a tinge of sarcasm in her inflection.

"Good and true, too!—like the man who greets you." The

voice rolled over the distance in a suavity of ready repartee. It was gratifying to know that his voice matched her preconceptions of the man himself. "Sallie and I are here in New York. All we need to make us dash up to Bentley to call on a certain adorable lady we know, is her permission and welcome."

The voice paused, awaiting her bidding, while the painful circumstance of her solitude, the darkened, cheerless house, and the well-nigh impossible task of entertaining this imposing pair, chased each other through her consciousness. And words of welcome died on her lips. But how to clear herself of seeming inhospitality? How to deny this lady-killer who had gotten from Sallie such an exaggerated idea of her charms, and ever again mount the high pedestal where Sallie was always insisting he had placed her? Her second of confusion was growing into a minute of awkwardness.

"Persis?" the voice had authority in it, as if to re-establish connection. "Persis?" this time it had reproach, mildness, persuasion. "Don't you want us, Persis—don't you want me, at last?" There was something in the plea that woke up old memories—Sallie's insistence of the subtile affinity between her two best friends; and her great desire to escape him softened to acquiescence, then rebounded to diplomacy.

"Yes—I want you—both." She hesitated again. "But I haven't the heart to interrupt your visit with Sallie—you so seldom have that pleasure." Ah, there was a hint indeed! It was just as well to let this charmer know how she regarded his treatment of Sallie. She wondered, too, why he never mentioned the hunting lodge? Was he snubbing her for her forwardness? Anyway she would never ask him about it now; her pride would have choked her first. To-morrow she would write and ask Sallie to find out why he neglected to answer her.

"Ah, I see you don't want us! you're too happy with that Jerry of yours! Strange how every fellow but me comes into his own! Still—to have heard your voice is a rich pleasure—

for one day! Will you pardon me if I tell you that I like your voice? I should know at once that you're all the things Sallie has described. Some day, the fates permitting, I shall see as well as hear you! Meanwhile, if there is ever anything I can do for you—that's my pleasure." Should she tell him that she was not in the habit of asking aid twice of a man who had so thoroughly snubbed her first request for help? But before she had decided, he went on: "Sallie is throwing a panic because I'm keeping her from you so long. *Au revoir—au revoir,* dear."

The last word came caressingly, faintly—so faintly that she was perplexed as to whether she ought to chide the boldness or whether she had not misunderstood. Leastways, she felt much better acquainted with Jim Kimberley. Again the sound of shifting feet, a suppressed titter, and Sallie announced, "I was jealous that Jim cared to talk to you so long. And beside, I want to speak to Jerry."

The request made Persis shiver, but it told her Calvin had kept her secret. For a moment she thought of hedging, but she said, "I'm so sorry—Jerry can't come—he's busy—he's out."

He was certainly out, and she hoped he was busy—coming home! "Out on Thanksgiving Day? Well, when he comes bounding in within the next ten minutes—I'm sure he would never leave you longer than that—please tell him that Sallie loves him still and is going to take his wife away from him for a little visit soon." The voice softened. "I envy you and Jerry your home—we're only at the Hoffman House. To-morrow Jim goes home—I'm making the most of to-night! Goodby, childie!"

The little visit cheered Persis: it put her in touch with forces outside herself and helped her project her thoughts beyond the home walls that she was fast making into a prison for herself. Far into the night she lay before the fireplace, turning over the

associations the visit revived. So Sallie envied her? It was very curious how their states balanced. Being in love with a man who hedged and slid out of marriage with you was not so different from being married to a man who had run away from you.

Whatever befell, she must sleep to-night. She was beginning to feel the effects of broken rest, and craved unconsciousness. So she undressed and crept into bed, her mind branded with a jumble of unhappy speculations about future Thanksgivings, about matrons of honour at weddings, about the day Jerry should marry Sallie and Jim Kimberley. With such dolefulness she mingled a prayer for Jerry's safety, and drifted off into troubled sleep.

Saturday night came—and still no word from Jerry! In after years she was never quite sure how the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving had passed with her; in memory the time looked blurred, and parts of it were totally indistinct. She finally settled it by believing that these two nightmare days had passed, such a horrid repetition of the first days of the week, a mechanism so complete, that she had fulfilled her share of them automatically. She recalled hazily that on Friday morning Calvin had telephoned her that most urgent business for his company compelled him to go to Pittsburg, that he regretted his absence from Bentley just at this time inexpressibly, that he would be home Sunday evening. With this last prop and comfort knocked from under her fainting hopes, came the haze and torpor that made time a partial blank to her. She could recall that the Swedish woman, disgusted with her repeated indifference to meals, had descended upon her, armed with a tray of steaming food; that with determined, red hands she had crumbed bread into a blue bowl of thick soup; that resolute spoonfuls of this mixture had been forced between her lips. After this came a cup of black coffee and a dazed walk around the room, when a glance in the mirror, the dense white-

ness of her face, the haunted look in her eyes, had roused her to the necessity of taking nourishment, as well as a grip on her nerves.

In such manner Saturday arrived, and she still held her peace and kept her own council. If she had seen at all clearly just what to do, just to whom she might cry out, she probably would have yielded to her need of help. But so long as there was uncertainty of best action, she clung to her first decision—to endure. At times Saturday afternoon she had had to hold herself with a will of steel to keep from starting some line of search. But she was sustained and hindered by the thought that as long as she could keep her poise she was in the aristocratic position—the best position to shield Jerry from the storm of inquiry and censure that was sure to break over her head before long. The moment she gave expression to her own fears, her own ignorance of Jerry's whereabouts, that moment she set a lighted match to the magazine of gossip that might be rendered non-combustible and harmless any moment by Jerry's return. To-morrow was Sunday, and who would fill Jerry's pulpit? A fresh wave of helplessness passed over her—what ought she to do? She hardly knew—it was all so strange to her. On telephoning Elder Gaylord she was finally relieved to learn that "by rare good chance-a, Brother Babbitt's wife's cousin was visiting in Bentley and would-a supply the pulpit."

As evening lengthened a wind began to blow out of the northwest over the top of Piety Hill, momently growing into the might of a tempest. Far away from over the big hilltop she heard it coming, heard it dip down low into the level places by the cornfield, and then mount again, roaring through the tops of the giant elm trees behind the church. She could hear the creak of their strong, supple backs, as they bent before the tempest and waved their great, gaunt arms in gestures of suppliance, groaning for maintenance and mercy at the pitiless hands of

the wind. The old white pine just outside her windows sighed and moaned like a human thing in mortal distress. One great arm of it, animated by especially boisterous blasts, occasionally beat up and down on the gable roof above her head. Constantly vitalised by gusts whirling around the corner of the house, the pine needles tapped, tapped against the window pane, like spectral finger-tips tapping to be let in.

Despite its compactness, the little stucco house swayed slightly in sympathetic vibration, and the new spruce wood of the panelling in her room creaked and snapped like the joints of some invisible, rheumatic wraith. Spiteful little gusts crept in about her casements, and made the muslin curtains quiver, life-like, sentient.

With every nerve a-tremble, she curled up in a corner of her couch amongst the pillows for shelter, till the night became for her a mediaeval battering-ram, beating against the bulwarks of her love and her power to endure. Finally inability to react to further imaginings changed her mood. Drawing her kimono about her, as if she feared the wind would blow it off, she started downstairs and on the top step met him. He had left his hat and overcoat in the hall and his black, ministerial clothing hung upon him, wrinkled and ill-fitting. With her trained instinct for physical signs and appearances, she estimated that he must have lost several pounds. His abundant hair was much dishevelled, bespeaking his recent passage through the wind. His smooth-shaven, ruddy face was wan and drawn, covered with a week's growth of stubbly brown beard. But the havoc in his eyes, the dear eyes, once so full of love and blueness—now filled with haunted wildness! And his breath came fast.

With no word, he held out both hands to her, and anguish filled her as she felt how cold and trembling they were. She held them so a moment, chafing, restoring them with the warmth of her own. Then feeling overcame her, and laying

her head on his shoulder, she wept. But the weight of her impress made him totter, and she realised how weak and worn he was, how in need of food and care. She led him to her room.

"Poor, poor darling," she wept over him. "Rest here till I bring you some hot milk. It won't take long—I'll hurry so!"

She flew to the little kitchen and tried to light the gas stove. But the wind made such a draught, and the gas spurted out so at her, that it took a third match to get a blaze. Something substantial was what Jerry needed: so while the milk heated she prepared him a plate of food. Not till he had finished it did she cease her ministrations; she unlaced his shoes, covered him with a slumber robe, and screened the glare of gas from his poor eyes. When she had taken the plate from him, she drew her rocker up beside him, and taking his hand in hers, sat waiting for him to speak to her. But he only gazed at her, speechless and frightened-looking, and at last she said, "Tell me about it, Jerry. Why did you go without me—and where?"

With his other hand he fumbled about piteously till he found her free one. His voice shook, and he whispered, "I don't know, dear—I forgot—I think I went—South."

He stopped and sighed wearily, as if the effort of speech overtaxed him; but her large, pent curiosity to know at last what had befallen him did not spare him long. "How far South?" she asked.

"I took some kind of a steamer in New York, and I think I got off at Savannah."

His air of painful uncertainty, of scanty surety and piteous exertion quite deprived her of judgment and resentfulness. That should come later, when he was rested and able to defend himself. A moment, and he went on.

"I don't know what I did there—or where I stayed. I think people were very kind to me—because I am a preacher. One day—I saw a steamer—they said it went to New York—I got on it—and I came home."

With the last words he smiled wanly, contentedly. He was like a runaway child, who, weary of his day's adventures, returns at night to a forgiving parent, whose worry and wrath had subsided into joy at his return.

"When did you come, Jerry? Have you been in Bentley long?"

"No—I waited hours in the Grand Central for a Bentley train! Finally a kind lady told me it left on the other side of the River. So somebody took me over the Weehawken Ferry, and when the midnight train left, I caught it." He smiled again, triumphantly. "I walked up from the station— nobody met me," he added, in grieved tones. "I thought I should never make the hill—and you. The wind nearly beat me into bits."

He stretched himself painfully, and sighed from the sheer physical relief of rest. The details of his week she could tear her imagination away from; but her heart still clamoured to know why he had gone off without her.

"Jerry, why didn't you tell me you were going? Why didn't you take me with you?" Her voice sobbed, but her eyes were keen.

He turned to her. "Dear—dear heart! I felt so strange—so ill—when I went. Some demon held me! I wanted to spare you—to go off—and let you rest—and be happy."

She set the difference of opinions aside—to be thrashed out later. "If you were ill—all the more reason why I go! You *are* ill—I see it now! Always before it has seemed so impossible for you, with your youth and your strength, to be really sick! How blind I was! Now you must trust yourself to me. To-morrow I shall send for my favourite doctor at the General Hospital; long ago I should have done it! Too long I've rested on my own ability to manage you!"

She spoke more in reproving soliloquy than to him. But he protested with more vigour than he had yet displayed. "I

am not sick! I want no doctor—but you. I will not have anybody looking after me—but you! How I've ached for you! How I've longed for the home—and your arms! God!—but it's good to be back! Come here—to me."

He took her in his arms and crushed her to him with a strength hardly congruous with his seeming weakness.

"You must rest," she whispered, "and all to-morrow—not a care—not a thought except to get well! I'll make you well, darling!"

He allowed her to undress him—all but his under flannels and one sock. These he would not part with. But he would take another glass of hot milk—for her; and presently he slept, heavily, greedily, as if sleep had been far from him for long.

Persis was too thankful to sleep; she wanted time to strip off her cloak of anguish and robe herself in the garment of relief. She turned the gas down low, but not so low she could not see her heart's desire lying there, close, safe in her care. The wind still raged over the hilltop and the pine needles still tapped, tapped against her window. But they had no power to haunt and hurt her now. Finally the wind, weary of its boisterous sport, slunk off into the night, and dropping beside Jerry on the bed, every sense merged into the master spirit of thankfulness, she fell into deep sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

JERRY, there's a little something I want to talk over with you. Do you feel rested enough to listen?"

Refreshed by a shave, a bath, and a good breakfast, and clad in his bath gown, Jerry lay back in bed puffing furiously at a long black cigar. He certainly looked ninety per cent. better than he did last night, Persis assured herself. Had it been the wildness of the wind-storm, the cheerless hour of his return, that had lent his appearance then such a ghastly turn? Aside from his paleness and loss of flesh, he now looked enough like himself not to be startling.

"Tell me now—at once! I'm rested enough to tackle anything," he announced, with animation. "I must have slept like the dead—what a waste of time! What troubles you, girl of mine?"

"You remember Sallie's check—she sent for foreign missions Well, the day you disappeared, Jerry—Nellie brought Miss Atwood to call on me. I thought it would be such a good time to give the money to Miss Atwood. I went up to my room for it—when I opened my desk there wasn't a sign of it anywhere—search as I would! And I haven't found it yet."

She waited for him to suggest some enlightenment. For just the fraction of a second a shrewd gleam twinkled in his eyes, and his glance shifted.

"What can have happened to it, Jerry? Surely no one has been in the house but us! Have you no idea what became of it?" She turned her troubled face to him, her quiet, candid eyes like search-lights in the steadiness of their gaze.

"I can't fancy, dear! At least, I think you misplaced it—I think it's in your room somewhere. I wouldn't trouble about it—if I were you! It will all come out right."

"But, Jerry, we can't afford to lose two hundred dollars. And that's what it amounts to, for I sent Miss Atwood a check for this amount."

"Well, that settles it, doesn't it? It can't be lost! Don't think of it again," he urged, ever ready to dispose of business details in the easiest possible manner, ever intolerant of the weight of "sordid concerns," as he considered all trade relations. And as if to emphasise his contempt of the matter, he dismissed it with a wave of his hand, asking, "What time is it?"

She glanced at her clock. "It's just half-past twelve."

He gave a low whistle of astonishment. "What a wicked waste of the day! I must be up and at my thesis."

"Don't get up to-day, dear."

"I must—what a preposterous idea!"

"Jerry, please don't try to write to-day! You are not able to do good brain work. Just rest—please! You are still shaky and over-wrought, and I can't bear to see you up, tearing around, wasting what energy you have left." She spoke very persuasively, the plea in her voice accentuating her usual earnestness. He looked disgruntled to be crossed and she went on. "Just let me take care of you to-day, darling. Remember what a long time it is since I've had that pleasure—remember how I love to do it! Be my good patient to-day. Let me pamper and care for you, and read to you. There really is no need of your getting up, because Elder Gaylord has provided a substitute. That reminds me that we are to telephone him by and by."

He started up in bed with sudden energy. "What day is it?"

"It's Sunday."

"Sunday! Do you mean that you have wilfully allowed me to sleep away the time I should have been in my pulpit, preaching God's word to my people—discharging my duties as pastor

of this parish?" He turned upon her ferociously, with the dreadful light of anger in his eyes. She had never seen him angry with her before.

"Jerry—believe me—it is all right! Elder Gaylord has provided somebody—last night—he told me so. You are in no fit condition to preach, Jerry. Remember that all Bentley has been excited over your absence. It is imperative that when you appear before them you be yourself—quite at your best."

"Quite at my best? I'm always at my best! There is absolutely nothing the matter with me! I repeat this—there is absolutely nothing the matter with me! Now can you understand? Bring me my clothes, at once!" He sprang out of bed and tramped around the room excitedly.

She met his agitation calmly. "Do be reasonable, Jerry! See how you totter when you dash about so! For once, be guided by me. Don't try to appear before the parish till you are rested and in a fit condition. I ask it, dear. Do it—this once—for me—for Persis." She had arisen, and stood facing him, the sweetness of her plea emanating from her smile, her voice, her whole personality.

He took her firmly by one arm, gazing down upon her, his face stern and imperious. "Persis, don't ever try to stand between me and my duty! It would be painful—fatal to choose between you—loving you both as I do." He put her at arm's length from him. "Be so kind as to withdraw while I dress." He escorted her to the door, and with gentle but firm pressure on her shoulder put her out in the hall, closing the door after her.

Distressed and surprised, she sat down on her hand-carved linen chest which she used for a hall bench on the second floor. It reminded her of the days when she used to embroider tray-cloths while she waited for Jerry to marry her—at last. What had come of it? She could hear him dashing around the room in pursuit of his clothes, opening bureau drawers, ransacking

her closet. Several small objects dropped before the vigour of his hunt, and from the crash of one of them she felt sure that her pretty lamp had gone. But when it came to the point of breaking hearts, she told herself, the matter of a piece of china more or less was not significant.

Presently the bedroom door burst open and Jerry appeared, fearfully and marvellously dressed. He had omitted the formality of a necktie and a hair brush, and stood arrayed in an immaculate white linen vest, fresh cuffs, and his ministerial black coat, beneath which projected his brown corduroy hunting breeches and a pair of patent leather ties.

Her first impulse on beholding him was to laugh. Her correct, fastidious Jerry, garbed like a comic opera clown! He was always protesting that she put away his clothes so neatly he could never find them. But when he stalked past her down the stairway, consternation displaced her mirth, and she followed to intercept him.

"Jerry! look—see what you have on! Surely you are not going downstairs dressed like that—the cook might see you! I'll find your clothes—come with me," and she held out her hand appealingly.

He paused on the middle stairs, drawing himself up proudly. "How can you be so light and unfeeling as to laugh! When will you learn that not a man's clothes, but his conduct, is what really makes him?"

He swept on downstairs, the wrinkles in his corduroy trouser legs, long accustomed to be tucked into heavy top-boots, giving the last grotesque touch to his ultra patent leather ties. At the foot of the stairs he stopped, his eyes revolving now toward the study, now toward the front door, as if in momentary confusion as to his course. Then his attention chancing to fall on his overcoat, which the Swedish woman had folded across a hall chair, he seized it and with vehement haste began to put it on.

"Where are you going, Jerry!" she cried, well frightened by now. "Wait—don't go out in the street looking like that!"

"Going? Where do you expect I'm going? Where would any reasonable man go? I'm going to find Elder Gaylord and apologise to him for shirking my duties." He opened the front door. "Ah—here he is now! Good afternoon, Mr. Gaylord! Come in—come in!" And leaning over the banister, she beheld her husband wafting Elder Gaylord along through the hall into the study, and shutting the door thoroughly, with a bang.

For the first time in her life she was glad of Elder Gaylord's advent, grateful to him for sparing her the humiliation of watching her husband appear on the streets of Bentley ensheathed in his present erratic and bivalvular raiment. She went downstairs till she reached the step next to the bottom, when a great fear as to the outcome of this interview in the study came over her. It was never enough for her to see the present merely; foresighted, highly sentient, imaginative, she was always looking ahead, planning, providing for the next step, trying to solve or erase the next problem. And while this trait often afforded her much unnecessary torment, it was the underlying principle of her resourcefulness. So now, apprehensive, trying to busy herself up with the thought that Calvin would be home in a few hours, and with a dizzy feeling in her head, she sat down on the stairs, leaning her face against the newel post. There was not the vestige of a possibility that Elder Gaylord would fail to notice Jerry's strange outfit. She knew that not so much as a posterior crease on the corduroy trouser legs could escape him; his eyes would file their way through a suit of armour.

Meanwhile, with her sensibilities aflame at last to Jerry's aberrations, whatever they might signify, she began to turn all her attention toward medical help. Her somewhat aristocratic standards of medical skill made her reject the aid of the Bentley practitioners; but some physician must see Jerry, at once. If he would have none of her medical suggestions, and she saw

anew how all along he had obstinately refused her, always insisting that he was not sick—she must put his case in the hands of some doctor wise and able enough to frighten and impress him with the need of rest and treatment, the seriousness of his condition. As she went over the list of New York physicians that her hospital training had familiarised her with, she settled on one, Dr. Gibbs, a specialist in nervous disorders, a man whose work as an alienist amongst the neurological clinics at General Hospital she had particularly admired and trusted. Strengthened by her new convictions, despite Jerry's protest that he would not have a doctor, forceful when once determined, she stepped to the telephone and arranged for Dr. Gibbs to come to Bentley that evening. Just as she was speculating on how Jerry would receive him, she heard an angry clamour issuing from the study, and Jerry's strong voice, now high-pitched and excited, riding over Elder Gaylord's thin tones till their thinness sank into a babble.

She strained every nerve of hearing to catch the import of the conversation, and finally divined that Elder Gaylord was tossing into the quarrel agitated and insistent bits of advice regarding a vacation for the minister, which Jerry was combating with masterful combinations of angry and forceful negatives. Then came a momentary lull, broken by Jerry's nervous footfalls as he paced the study, and another onslaught from Elder Gaylord, that her keen understanding told her was probably a request for Jerry's explanation of his absence.

"Explain?" she heard Jerry thunder. "And who the devil are you that I should explain my affairs to you? I would like to know what you have got to say about it, if I choose to go off on a little excursion! Explain? I'll request you to get out as fast as you can—to leave me alone in the future. Permit me to escort you to the hall."

The study door flew open, as if the power of a hurricane were behind it. And Jerry, with the grace and manner of a courtier,

wafted the astonished elder out into the hall, slammed the study door, and locked it.

She arose to meet the outraged guest. She had an intuition that it lay with her to set the unfortunate matter as right as could be. There are times when we must quit our niches, leap suddenly and far, if we would land on a better ground of vantage. As she faced him she saw that his wrinkled, sharp little countenance was softened into deep sorrow: she had expected to find him outraged, fussy, nervously distressed. And by that one look of his she modified her whole uncharitable opinion of him, wondered indeed if she had not done better to have confided in him from the first; and saw that what she, in her hypersensitiveness to censure, had mistaken for prying curiosity about Jerry's disappearance had really been fear and anxiety for his welfare. And she felt that she could trust herself at last to the little man's kindness. He held out his gnarled hand to her and she took it, drawing him into the library. And this time, instead of establishing herself behind the table, she placed her chair beside him. "I can't tell you how sorry I am for what I have just heard. Please accept my apology for my husband's conduct—we owe you one. The truth is, Mr. Wadhams is not well."

He rubbed his chin, cleared his throat, and dabbed his handkerchief into his moist eyes, mumbling something about no apology being due from her.

She went on, "I think no one here in Bentley realises how worn out my husband is. He is suffering from some form of nervous trouble brought on by years of overwork and study. Mr. Gaylord, I ask you to be generous enough to overlook his hasty words to you just now, and to try to arrange with the proper authorities for a long vacation for him."

He hitched about in his chair and produced a second handkerchief which he applied to the lustre of his silk hat. This new conciliatory attitude of hers made him so very nervous!

"My dear-a child!—ahem! I shall be glad to do all in my power to help you. I have-a been on the point, several times of late you may recall, of offering assistance to you both. The truth is-a, Mrs. Wadhams, that I have foreseen for some time this breakdown in your husband. Let me advise you to place your husband under the care of our best physician in Bentley."

"Thank you—I've sent to New York for a specialist."

"Ah-indeed!" He fumbled behind his chair for a cane he had left in the hall, looked around the library helplessly, seeking inspiration to match her approachableness with words of comfort. "I beg you to hope for the best! Again I bid you good afternoon, Mrs. Wadhams."

The question now was, should she tell Jerry that Dr. Gibbs was coming, or not? Which way would irritate him least? Was it possible to do anything without irritating him? Anyway, she would be reasonable herself, and perhaps when Jerry found that medical help was actually arranged for, he would be glad and docile. Sick people often were like that, when matters were at last taken out of their own hands.

So she rapped on the study door, only to be ignored. She rapped again, calling, "Please let me in, Jerry! I have something special to say." Another wait, during which she heard him strike a match for a new light and his sixth cigar since breakfast. Then he turned the key and jerked open the door. His whole appearance was excessively agitated; it was impossible for him to keep the muscles of his arms and legs still, and the pupils of his eyes were dilated widely. She drew back, regretting that she had been so precipitate in bringing her proposition before him.

He invited her to come in, and her growing anxiety for him led her to declare herself hastily: "Jerry, I thought you ought to know that I have sent for Dr. Gibbs."

He faced her, his rage at Elder Gaylord's interference fast returning. "How dare you send for a physician without my

permission, Persis? One would think I were a child or a lunatic, to be thus ignored in matters that concern me alone! You may step to the 'phone and tell him not to come. For if he does come to Bentley I will not see him! And if he comes to my home I will turn him out!"

Quite convinced of his ability to do this, she dreaded in anticipation the meeting of the two men. But she would not yield her decision about having Dr. Gibbs come.

"Please be reasonable, Jerry, I am so——"

"Reasonable?" he thundered, pushing his desk chair aside, and flinging his tall height into such a pace that he fairly revolved about the little room. "Do you think I am going to endure being spied upon, first by you, then Elder Gaylord, and then some friend of yours from New York? I'm sick and tired of this espionage! Harassed, hunted, persecuted first by one person, then another! Calvin Darrach is beginning to follow me up, too! He would best have a care for himself." His tones were very threatening, but she knew no fear of him and held his gaze in the power of her own.

"There isn't a man in the world who would do more for you than Calvin! How can you speak so of your friends?"

"Friends?" He flung the word out with a roll of execration and scorn. "I have no friends! Even Sallie has turned against me! She would injure me if she could!"

"Didn't she just send you two hundred dollars for missions because she thought it would give you pleasure?"

She still did not realise how idle it was for her to argue with him, how impervious he was to all reason. He had been her king who could do no wrong for so many years!

He stopped his revolutions suddenly, shoved his left hand down into the length of his pocket, and ran the fingers of his right one repeatedly through his abundant brown hair. "She sent it to me to use as I chose! And if you really want to know something, I spent it on my trip to Savannah. You will have

a long and a merry hunt if you try to find that check in your writing desk!" And he laughed gleefully, immoderately.

"Do you mean that you spent every cent of it?" she asked, marvelling, in her simplicity of expenditures, how a man could dispose of so much money in so short a time.

"I believe I did—I meant to!" He went through the pockets of his hunting trousers, regardless of the fact that he had not worn them on his trip, and from the pockets of his frock coat produced nothing but a fresh supply of cigars, two of which he lighted. "If you wish to make yourself positively sure that I did spend every cent of my money you might look through my checked suit." It flashed over her that he referred to a certain suit of clothes that he had been much attached to while working in his uncle's law office back in Springfield.

The mass of her new revelations about him, her tardy realisation of the peculiarity of his ideations and irresponsibilities; his delusions about clothes and right conduct, and his excessive and morbid devotion to religion, fell upon her understanding with the weight of despair.

And while these new fears were crystallising in her brain and congealing her heart, her husband turned to her with "You'll pardon me Persis, if I go so far as to suggest that I would like to be left alone! I have business with God now." He opened the door for her and there was nothing left for her to do but to accept his suggestion and pass out.

When the nine o'clock Sunday night train pulled into Bentley it brought Dr. Gibbs. This gentleman of distinction, despite his advanced years and a reputation for skill in mental diseases that spread over the Atlantic seaboard, had still been big and broad enough to keep humane and young. His hair fell around his thought-drawn forehead in a gray mane, but his outlines were spare and flexible, his smile tolerant, and the twinkle in his blue eyes keen. As with elastic step he started down the station platform to find a cab, he sent sharp glances into the

half-distinct faces of the Bentleyites who stood in lounging spectatorship of the New York train, lest perchance Miss Litchfield should have come to meet him and he miss her. He was still uncertain of her married name, and knew only that he had been called out in the country to the home of the bright nurse at General Hospital whose husband was threatened with nervous breakdown; queer thing how these clever nurses, with a career and independence before them, and with all their knowledge of life, would make the mistake of marrying neurotic men. She had directed him over the telephone, when he had become entangled with her new name, to come to the Presbyterian parsonage, whither he told his cabman to take him now.

Persis was waiting for him in the hall, praying that Jerry would maintain his immense seclusion until she had had a word with the alienist, distressed lest he refuse to see him at all. She let Dr. Gibbs in herself, fearing that the ring of the doorbell might distract Jerry's attention, pleased to find that so preëminent and busy a man should remember her. Yes indeed: he recalled perfectly her tact in managing intractable patients at his clinic. He glanced around the little library with its distinct air of individual and fine taste, his eyes returning to her with full approval: he was pleased to find Miss Litchfield—he begged pardon—her married name? Wadhams? Ah, yes—so happily situated. He hoped that her husband's illness was not of long duration—perhaps it would save time if he saw the patient at once.

She intimated that there were two or three questions which she wished to ask first; but when he turned the force of his penetrating, professional regard full upon her, she could not recall what they were: so different was reporting to a specialist the condition of a hospital patient from reciting the case of her husband.

Noting her hesitancy, he said kindly, "Would it not simplify matters if you let me ask the questions?" He removed his

rimless eyeglasses and polished them elaborately with his spotless handkerchief, while the muscles around his eyes began to focus with the habit of concentration, and the friendliness in his manner sank below the level of the scientist. "When did you first notice these nervous symptoms in your husband, Miss Litchfield—pardon—Mrs. Wadhams?"

"I—I hardly know. Perhaps you'll understand when I tell you that by temperament my husband has always been nervous and highly strung."

"How long have you been married?"

"About six months."

"In this time have you noticed that his nervous symptoms seemed aggravated?"

"Yes—I think they have. Or else I have had more opportunities to observe them."

"Have you at any remote or recent time noted in your husband any tendency to vacillate, any unsteadiness of motives and methods?"

Vacillation and unsteadiness! The words rolled out of the past, like the rumble of thunder in the distance.

"Three or four years ago Mr. Wadhams saw fit to leave very special advantages in a law practice to follow the dictates of his higher nature." She spoke with difficulty, it was still so painful for her to recall lost opportunities. "He left the law for the ministry."

The alienist glanced at her with a flash of enlightenment. "Ah! And did he pursue his efforts in this line uninterruptedly?"

"Yes—no. That is, after about a year he left the Church of England for the Presbyterian faith. But since, he has pursued his course with passionate devotion, as you see."

"I do see, yes! And you say he follows his religious work with great zest and abandon?"

"For three years he has worked summer and winter, day and

night, with an overmastering persistency and earnestness that defied all interference, and regardless of hygiene, proper food and exercise, has devoted himself to the dictates of theology and religion."

"I see. And now tell me, please, if you have at any time noticed that your husband was beset with any strange ideations, such as, for example, the notion that he was suffering persecution at the hands of his friends or neighbors. Has he seemed at all indifferent in matters of truth, or in general terms, to moral issues?"

She started and winced. This wizardlike man had such a faculty for laying his finger on the sore, bruised spots. But she held to her habits of loyalty to physicians, and while her heart-cries wailed through her consciousness, she answered, "Yes—that is, he is quite secretive by nature. And there have been times when our care and solicitude for him have proved too wearisome for his peace of mind and comfort."

"I see."

"One thing more—he has on a most extraordinary combination of clothes. I did not insist that he change them, dreading to irritate him." She knew in her heart that it was not in her power to "insist," or to conquer any of Jerry's wilfulness; but she did not say so. "I hope, when you meet him, you will pardon his strange appearance."

The alienist smiled at her; her bit of proud apology touched him. "I am quite accustomed to little idiosycrasies in the manner and garbs of my patients," he assured her charmingly. "I shall understand. And now, will you be kind enough to present me to your husband, please."

It was a woful moment for Persis, hung between her dread of colliding with Jerry's indomitable and capricious will, and fear of having called this busy man away from valuable practise to no effect. But her discomfort was futile, for while she wavered the study door burst open, and Jerry, flushed, excited,

and demi-garbed erratically, tramped into the library and faced the alienist.

"Pardon—Persis! I should like to inquire what manner of a gentleman this might be who occupies so much of your evening in suppressed conversation." He spoke with no vestige of his once fine courtesy and culture, loudly, wrathfully, with a masculine instinct of intolerance of all competition for the attention of the woman he loved.

"Jerry—one moment, darling! This is one of my friends from the General Hospital. Let me present you to Dr. Gibbs."

Jerry drew himself up haughtily, to the full extent of his six feet. "In my eyes this does not justify your entertaining the personage while I am bound down to my work. You will please accompany me—to the study."

He stepped slightly to one side, to make passage for her by the library table. Meanwhile the alienist had never taken his eyes off him, but without unpleasant regard, heeded every slightest move and symptom, with the effortless skill of the master. Intuitively, she felt that his trained and psychic sixth sense was filtering down through the poor, perverted neurons to the very bed-rock of Jerry's being, thoroughly, vitally analysing, classifying, diagnosing. And surely so wise a man would be able to help her!

A moment passed, and the benign voice of Dr. Gibbs filled in the unhappy gap. "Your wife and I, Mr. Wadhams, are very old friends, as she explains to you. I came to Bentley, hoping I might be able to suggest some help for you. Mrs. Wadhams tells me you have not felt well of late?"

"I never felt better in my life than I do this minute! In fact, my dear sir, I feel abundantly able to pitch you out of my house." Something in his eyes looked as if he were dangerously near committing this act; instead, he locked his powerful hands behind his back and began to pace. "I do not want and I will not have a pack of doctors hounding my every move!

My friends have been bothersome enough, and now my wife, whose comfort and help I might naturally suppose I could rely on, has joined the ranks of the mob who harass me. It is not two hours since I particularly requested her not to send for you. I told her that if she did I would throw you out! And being a man of my word I purpose to do so. I give you just three minutes to leave my premises, Dr. Nibbs. Good night!" And with watch in hand he returned to the study, locking himself in.

"Since my presence so distresses your husband, Miss Litchfield, it will be best to expedite my suggestions. I presume that with your knowledge of medicine you will prefer that I tell you the truth. Your husband is suffering from a common form of mental aberration, borderland peculiarities of neuropsychoses, known as paranoia. In his case the disease has taken the form of religious mania, and it is as this that we shall have to regard him in our management of his case." He turned the full force of his sympathetic personality upon her. "It gives me unspeakable sorrow to thus be given to frankness with you. But I know that you are a very brave young woman and that the truth will help you in all your future relations with him. My first advice to you is to have him placed under proper restraint and care."

She had taken his word so far without flinching. But the implication that others could care for Jerry better than she could slashed her heart, and she bowed her head in her hands.

He mistook her emotion for fear. "Don't let my words make you over-anxious," he said gently. "I do not anticipate any violence on the part of your husband to-night. The chances are that after this recent outbreak he will have a period of depression and calm before the next seizure. Don't be frightened unnecessarily; it is only that experience teaches us that advanced cases, like your husband's, should be placed where they can neither harm themselves nor any one else. Isn't there some

small institution near at hand where you could feel assured of good care for him and also be able to visit him daily?"

Dr. Gibbs looked at his watch for his margin. It was a novelty to him to have his time limit set by a patient. "I see that I have but two minutes left," he added. A humourous smile played around his keen eyes, subsiding instantly as she raised her head to answer him.

"We have a new hospital here in Bentley. I do not care for the staff of doctors, but the man who built it is our best friend."

"Good! In the morning have your husband transferred to the hospital. When he is nicely installed there, I will come up and with the house doctor go over him somewhat more carefully. Meanwhile, try to rest! You may expect me to-morrow, about noon. Good night—and good courage." He hurried into his overcoat, gave her his hand, and let himself out.

She glanced at the library clock: he had been in the house ten minutes, had made his diagnosis almost without seeing his patient, and had told her about Jerry what she had not learned in a lifetime.

CHAPTER XVII

PERSIS closed the door after the specialist, and turned to find herself a stranger in her own home. The gray shadows in the library, and the copper pieces gleaming softly in the firelight—what part of her were they now? All the half-lights and the shadows and the quiet, tender home effects that she had lavished her artistic longing upon and loved so well were entombed in the great hulking blackness of despair and doom. All that had once seemed so enduring, all that she had cherished so dearly and so long, she saw jostled promiscuously out on the curbstone, piled rudely into moving vans, unroofed, dispossessed by disaster. She felt dizzy, flighty, unfamiliar to herself: she was like some skilful and confident equestrian thrown suddenly and violently from his saddle, who, reviving somewhat from the effects of his tumble, is still uncertain for the moment whether he walks or rides horseback.

She started back across the hall, feeling her way with outstretched hands. Presently they touched the polished corners of the newel post, and steadying herself by it, she sat down on the stairs. The familiar attitude and place, reminding her of similar postures while she waited for the five o'clock hour of tryst, while Jerry was displaying his neckties, and lately, while he had his tantrum with Elder Gaylord, gave her the feeling of one who, losing his way in a deep wood, comes upon a certain tree or boulder that he passed hours ago in his wanderings. She took a full, encompassing glance around her home that looked so monumental of happiness. She saw the fair, youthful procession of her heart's sovereign desires pass by. And sulking along in laggard triumph rearward, she saw the curse that "kept them from the perfect thing." She knew

that all along, since early youth, there had been a phantom sitting at her feast; that always when she had looked at Jerry she had stood with the sun in her eyes; that love had blinded her. Then a mighty astonishment, amazement absolute, swept over her at her own colossal ignorance and lack of perception in realising Jerry's danger: she had been so unwilling to find anything but perfection in him, so determined that he must excel. Still how could a woman born with the gifts of foresight and discrimination, born to take life judiciously, and, moreover, trained in medical experience, have ignored, have mistaken, deceived herself so long, failed to interpret the symtoms that the alienist, step by step, had fashioned into a diagnosis, almost without seeing Jerry? She realised that had she seen such dangers hovering over anybody else in the world, she would have read their import. Ah, her love had been stone-blind!

Overlapping her amazement, overriding her own misery, came a great wave of sympathy and tenderness for him so cursed by destiny. She saw him, as always, in the full pride of his superb stalwart strength with the vigour and the more promising part of his life unfulfilled; a young man of fine parts and splendid potentialities; the high attainment of his early scholarship; the one time cleanness of his moral developments; his high-bred ideals—the affection and spontaneity of his nature —all the traits for which she had loved him. She saw down the vista of the future years the ruins of the influence he might have had; the wrecks of the work he might have done. She saw his superb physical strength confounded and misused by lack of mental coördination to conserve and direct it; and a blind rage at things as they are seized her. She bowed her head in her hands and moaned in her anguish of impotent revolt. The God for faith in whom she had struggled so, for worship and belief in whom she had at last simplified a creed to working order, was asking her to lead her Jerry to His sacrificial altar and was bidding her touch the match to the altar-pile.

Once more her mind came to rescue her from the torture of her divinations. She saw the process of his break-up at last—how he had gone to pieces first nervously, then mentally, and at length morally. From out of the realm of childhood and the past there issued certain of his pronounced individual traits, his emotionalism, his unevenness of temper—traits developed in some important directions, dormant in others equally important. All through his early youth there had been his domineering wilfulness, his intolerance of anybody disagreeing with him; his immense secretiveness about trivialities, and his cyclonic irritability. Then had come the period of his vacillations; his arbitrary dislike of compromise; his irrational brilliancy; his flashes of optimism followed by depression and gloom; his abstraction to normal diversions and happiness, and his passionate abandonment to work and religion. And recently came the climax in his absentmindness; his inability to keep appointments; his tendency to argue from illogical premises; his erraticisms about his clothes; his morbid susceptibility to surroundings and small stimulus; his antipathy toward his friends; his growing callousness to points of fine courtesy and right conduct; his lonely aberrations; his inability to realize the significance of his offences; his deviations from the truth; and his perverted moral sense. She saw now all the strange borderland peculiarities that distinguish the unsound mentality from that of normal balance. Glancing back over their two years together in New York, she recalled vividly the weeks and months she had scarcely seen him; she knew at last that it was not normal for a young lover to be so near his sweetheart and deny himself the happiness of sometimes being with her, just as she realised that it was not normal for a man to give away his entire patrimony—albeit to the poor.

She recalled times when she had judged him, if not audibly, at least in her heart: times when she had considered his neglect

of her and indifference to her small rights and pleasures, unkind and unnecessary. Especially she recalled the afternoon when he had not kept his engagement to walk with her. While she had stood in such superlative rage at his discourtesy, he had been wandering off somewhere alone, the prey of his horrible mental perversion. It had gotten its fast hold upon him, while she had been allowing him to overwork, judging him by her extortionately high ideals of manhood, demanding of him that he fulfil her impersonal, impossible conception of perfection—her Jerry, who had come back to her in the ravage and ruin of his wanderings, without a care or thought of explanation or pardon. A great regret swept over her, an aching remorse that she had been so exacting when she should have been tolerant and understanding. How impatient and aloof she had been at times; how proudly she had held herself from him—to proud to step from her pedestal of womanhood long enough to break through the wall of his involuntary seclusion in the study—while yet there had been a chance of saving him! She had accepted his mandate for solitude so literally, had left him so pitiably to himself. If she had only known! The old wail of the unseeing whose eyes have been opened at last, vibrated through the mainsprings of her being, till its echo sounded to the deep recesses of balked purpose and the wreckage of hopes. She recalled times when she had noted the import of what he laboured so to write. At odd moments, when she had been dusting his study, she had tried to understand scraps of his abstruse metaphysical treatises, and had always lost herself in their haze of incoherence. There had been a time when she had blindly told herself that Jerry's theses were too profound, too far beyond her mental range to be within the pale of her understanding; but now she saw that they were only the product of his poor unbalanced brain and, bitterer still, the cause of the unreckoned, foodless, sleepless nights that had consumed his mind so mercilessly. What she had mistaken for religious

devotion had been in reality only the fanaticism of incipient mania.

If she had seen in time, had resolutely put through her plan to take him off somewhere to rest; if she had not wasted so much valuable time waiting for Jim Kimberley's letter about the hunting lodge; if she had placed Jerry under Dr. Gibbs's care before the ravages of disease had pillaged the very seat of his nerve vitality and brain cells, might she not have spared him this climax of breakdown, saved him from the destruction that now threatened his career, his future, and his life? So over and over the ground of disaster she went, vibrating from sympathy to rebellion, to remorse, to self-condemnation, her spirit crying out from a false and irreparable past to a cruelly uncertain and intolerable future. Her temples throbbed in rhythm to her revolt and heart-ache, and she pressed her finger-tips over her hot eyelids to shut out the picture of what was to come. The nervous pressure sent a swarm of little red and gold flecks dancing before her blank vision; and through the whirling chaos of specks she saw herself wandering through awesome wastes and stretches of fallow years, a soul of despair, riven hopes, and vanquished desires—mateless, disintegrated, barren, squandering her rich resources of youth in futile haste to seek and find her lost affined mate. Time reached before her ever a vacancy and a burden, since "all was lost except a little life."

She tried to free herself from the dissipation to which fear and fancy had driven her. She made herself recall what the alienist had said, that probably Jerry would have a period of calm. In their turn, these thoughts strengthened her, and she asked herself what arrangement was best for the night? That she was in some actual danger she knew; but that Jerry would ever lay violent hands on her she would not believe. Still, she was sure of the knowledge that insane people often did turn against those they loved best. Should she send for somebody to stay with her? The Swedish woman had lumbered up to

bed hours ago, just after the washing of her scanty tea dishes. Then she remembered that Calvin had telephoned that he would be home Sunday night. Had the time not come when she should keep her promise to call on him for help? Next she noticed that the presence of any third person lately had the effect of throwing Jerry into periods of great excitability, and that if left to himself he was more than apt to continue whatever occupied him. So once more her good courage and poise saved her from making unnecessary disturbance. A great, brooding desire to watch over Jerry, to serve him, to shield him from harm redoubled in her: she crept along the hall to the study door, every nerve fibre taut and alert with caution, lest she rouse him. With stifled heart throbs she bent over to peek at him through the keyhole. But the film of cigar smoke that issued through the opening made it impossible for her to see, and so she put her ear to the door instead. Through the closed panels came the scratch of his fountain pen, as he scribbled over pages of foolscap with lightning speed. She could hear the rustle of paper as he tossed aside page after page of his imaginings. Once she heard him, impatient with some mistake of text, rend the paper into bits and toss it into the scrap basket: and following this rage came the scratch of a match, as he lighted another assuaging cigar. A new fear that he might set fire to his papers came over her; and always the energetic scribble, scribble, and the rustle of filled pages! Such rapid production, of even nonsensical, incoherent text, such passionate concentration, was enough to exhaust any man!

It came over her poignantly that probably he had taken no nourishment since eleven o'clock Sunday morning. She had served him a good breakfast then, when he awoke from his long rest. It was now past midnight, and he had refused his supper. For weeks the Swedish woman had been instructed to leave a bottle of milk on his window ledge, and she hoped that maybe he had taken part of this. She longed to bring him suitable,

abundant food; but experience was teaching her to let well enough alone. Still, so much of everything good in the house, plenty of means to buy anything necessary, and no amount of tact or coaxing could make him touch food! She crept away from the door, a firm white hand pressed against her heart to still its noise, thrilled with the irony of her position, that despite her knowledge, her heart full of devotion and her willingness to annihilate self in service of him, she must still remain outside his locked door. Well, the rest of the night centred around two issues: a watch lest Jerry set the house on fire, and some plan that would shift him from the voluntary captivity of his study to the involuntary imprisonment of a private room in the hospital. She glanced at the telephone, looked up the fire alarm number, and turned the hall lamp low. Then she tiptoed upstairs, intending to put on her kimono and rest. But on second thought she decided that in case of accident or outbreak it would not be wise to undress; so she lay down crosswise on her bed, and fell into makeshift sleep. Every hour of the night she stole down to listen at the study door. The incessant scribble of pen and the rustle of paper met her ear each time when pacing footsteps did not. Still this was better than mania. Interspersed with her transient naps and trips downstairs were troublous plans for transferring Jerry. And so Monday morning came at last.

The problem of transference did not grow any easier in the light of morning. Was the voluntary prisoner in the stronghold of his study to be taken by inclination, force, or strategy? The idea that he would of his own free will go down to Bentley Hospital and give himself up to treatment was preposterously unlikely. The idea of overcoming him with superior strength, binding, taking him from his home was intolerably painful to her. Moreover, his great physical power and surly opposition to all interference made the question of force inexpedient, if not actually dangerous. He must be handled tactfully,

confined by strategem. And the person who could do this best of all was Calvin. She reflected, too, that he should hear of Jerry's return through her rather than by hearsay. It was already nine o'clock, and at twelve the alienist would come. Only three hours in which to achieve a well-nigh impossible task! If she wished to catch Calvin before he headed his car for New York, there was no time to be lost. She had stepped to the telephone, the Darrach call on her lips, when the realisation of the risk she took in using the telephone within Jerry's earshot saved her from committing such a mistake. She must write a note. She flew to her desk, dashed off a few hasty words telling Calvin of Jerry's return and her need of help, and stealing down the back stairs with her message, bade her servant take it to the Darrachs' boarding house with all possible haste.

The Swedish woman did not take kindly to haste. Despite her faithfulness and orbital constancy, she had three characteristics that irritated the minister's wife much. Persis, with all her magnetism, her gift of striking response and sparks out of other people, and her capacity to make resources at hand prevail, had never been able to overcome any one of these three traits. She had never been able to instill abidingly in her servant's mind the propriety of coming to her, face to face, when she had questions to ask or messages to give, instead of bellowing them out at the foot of the stairs. She had never been able to teach her to answer the telephone; the Swedish woman notwithstanding demonstrations and lengthy lessons, had always entertained a dislike and a fear of the unholy instrument, and had it personified small-pox, could not have avoided it with greater dread and diligence. Nothing in all the house disturbed her so much as the ring of the telephone bell. At such times she either pretended not to hear it, ignoring it with sullen disregard, or standing at the foot of the hall stairs, shouted for her mistress to come and answer the monstrosity.

Since this last method combined two of the traits that most exasperated Persis, she was more often apt to apply it, albeit quite without intention of giving offence. And lastly, she had strong and well served principles of dislike about all matters of hurry. She stood now before the kitchen table pounding prodigious blows from her podgy, powerful fists into a sphere of bread dough, and as Persis gave her order for the swift delivery of the note, glowered and gloomed at her in sulky protest, loath to run the risk of ruining a big batch of bread. This daily and growing habit of being sent out to mail letters and run errands and take notes ill matched her stereotyped notion of kitchen routine. When she had told the minister she would cook for him and do his housework, she had not had in mind being messenger boy to his wife. She mumbled something about folks using a telephone when they had one, and about to-morrow being wash-day. But at length she scraped the dough off her broad hands with a case-knife and washed them vigorously under the spigot. Bundling a knitted shawl around her heavy face, she strode off with the note at a stolid, set pace.

In twenty minuter Persis heard the snort and swish of an engine puffing up Piety Hill, and opening the door a moment later let in Calvin. It had been five days since he had seen her, and the great change in her manner and looks went to his heart. She was markedly thinner, almost sylphlike in her tall grace: he wondered when she had last had any food and care. Under her eyes great semicircles of sleeplessness and watching rimmed the waxen pallor of her cheeks. The quiet transparency of her eyes was opaque with tribulation. She did not need to tell him that the worst had come. "How you are suffering!" he whispered, as one involuntarily lowers his voice in the presence of great pain.

She pressed the forefinger of her left hand across her tight lips, and with her right on the sleeve of his coat, drew him into

the library, nodding her head towards the study. He understood that there was great need of secrecy and tiptoed along after her. There was no time to lose, she knew: Jerry might appear any instant. He had a diabolical new instinct lately for appearing whenever she had to talk about him to anybody. With her usual straightforwardness she plunged into the heart of her story, and choking down her rising emotion, told Calvin Jerry's havoc, in whispers.

"He came home—Saturday night—in the wind storm. He did such strange, strange things—I was so frightened—I sent for Dr. Gibbs." She stammered in her nervous haste to make him understand. "He says—that Jerry's mind is breaking down—that I am not safe with him—that I must put him—in the hospital—this morning—now! I dread it so—the scene—the hurt—I am so afraid—so helpless—!" She looked up at him and at last he understood that she had sent for him to take her burden into his hands. Her dependence on him transmuted his pity, his yearning, his love of her into a great resolve to serve her, to save her, if he could, from further suffering, dismembered hopes, and unnecessary anguish.

"You dear, to send for me!" he whispered. He put a world of meaning into the words. It was as if he was trying to tell her how infinitely sorry he was about it all; that he understood the inferno she was passing through; that she had paid him such a high compliment by sending for him; that he was very proud and grateful to help her; that she might trust him and rest in his care from now on.

She met his regard and words with a wan smile that told him her relief and thanks; but she did not dwell long in the realm of personalities, for there were still such vital issues to be arranged. "Jerry wouldn't let Dr. Gibbs touch him last night—drove him out of the house! At noon the Doctor is coming again—to suggest something for the future—the outcome. We must get Jerry into the hospital by noon—somehow—I

thought you would know how?" Her voice broke and she put her hands to her eyes, forcing back her tears. She made a supreme effort to regain herself, and he noticed that she swerved slightly, that the reaction of worry and sleeplessness had begun to set the boundaries to her endurance. He placed a chair for her and made her sit down.

"Don't look ahead! Just go on being brave and having faith! Trust to me now—I'll get him into the Hospital—never fear! Where is he? In the study? Wouldn't he come out to talk to me?"

They still spoke in whispers and she answered him, "I think if you talked out loud he would."

So Calvin, his big cheerful voice resounding through the first floor, talked of commonplaces: he told her the morning news, and the latest about Nell. Nell was not feeling very well—that was why she had not been up to call; in fact, she spent most of the time in her room now. And presently, as Persis answered these communications, Jerry appeared in the library door.

He was still dressed in his frock coat and hunting trousers, but his general appearance was orderly. Aside from the sallowness of sleeplessness and the worn abstracted look in his eyes, he seemed calm and like himself. He met his wife's gaze with a tender smile and a "Good morning, dear," while she was inexpressibly relieved to see him relaxed and at peace. She had dreaded his boisterous, wordy approach so!

"Good morning, Cal! I thought I heard your voice. I'm glad to see you." He put an emphasis on the "glad," with his old-time cordiality. This touch of his former self, his charm of hospitality, gripped her heart as no exposition of symptoms could have done, for dimly, faintly it revived a hope that despair had been devouring of late. From habit, she wondered if he had drunk the milk on his window ledge. It was amazing how a man could put out such superhuman

effort night after night and keep up at all. But wasn't the very fact that he could endure such fatigue in favour of recovery? Now that Dr. Gibbs had him in hand, wasn't there a fair chance of staving off the fearful reaction that must follow such long continued strain?

Calvin held out his hand in charming naturalness: she could hardly believe he was plotting a scheme to take his friend into captivity. "Good morning, Jerry! Isn't this a great day for a spin up the Catskills? How are you feeling?"

"O, I'm all right! What a beautiful coat you have—I haven't seen it before."

The pathos of his remark went to the hearts of both of his spectators. Calvin's new raccoon coat had been the subject of an animated after-dinner conversation the last time Jerry and Persis had dined with the Darrachs.

"Yes, isn't it a beauty? I've got the car outside—won't you put on your ulster and go for a little ride? The air is fine this morning."

"Thanks, I think I will! Persis, will you please hunt up my fur gloves for me?" He took to the proposition electrically. Persis, mindful of his equal velocity in changing his mind, speedily produced his gloves, and while he was hunting in the hall closet for his ulster and cap, hurried to the kitchen to prepare a glass of hot milk. She returned presently with a tray and two steaming glasses. "I thought this would taste good on such a frosty morning," she said, offering Calvin a glass first. Calvin took his milk, and Jerry, mutually susceptible to her suggestion, drained his glass. Calvin lost no time in buttoning his coat up to his chin and drawing on his gauntlets, while Jerry kept pace with these preparations. At what moment would his docile mood shift to obstinate, maniacal opposition, she wondered? In her nervous haste to get them off, she was the most agitated of the three.

"Ready?" Calvin asked engagingly.

"Sure to be!" The voice rang out with boyish joy in anticipation of the ride. He turned to her with what ever afterwards seemed to her a passionate concentration of farewell; he took a look around his home, glanced back at the study, and turned his head to one side in order to get a view of the library over Calvin's bulky coat. Then he smiled and laid his hands on her shoulders. "Good-by, darling—I'll be back soon!" He stooped and kissed her on her hair, her eyes and her lips.

Then the two strode down the front steps. She stood in the doorway still, watching them. Half way down the hill, Calvin turned to call back, "We'll telephone you from our first stop."

She understood poignantly that he would telephone her when he had Jerry safe in the hospital. But she answered bravely, "Thank you—good-by, Jerry! Enjoy your ride, Jerry—for me."

He turned to her once more, smilingly, touched his visored cap in salute, and flashed back, "I'll do anything, darling, for you!"

She stepped into the house—the air was so piercingly cold for one not dressed to meet it. She went to the library window, watching them swing along side by side with the easy grace of athletes and the firm springing steps of those descending a grade. The echo of Calvin's feet, shod in heavy-soled shoes in contrast to Jerry's patent leather ties, came back to her from the flagstones. They were a magnificent pair to look upon, with their manly strides and commanding heights, Calvin overtopping Jerry's six feet by three inches. Their heavy coats built them out into proportions of young giants; as they chatted and laughed while Calvin explored levers, bits of their vigour floated back over their shoulders in silvery clouds of breath. Any spectator might have envied a woman such a husband and such a friend. But to Persis, with her knowledge of the terrible disparity between them, the sight of them together brought a fresh sense of the transcendent unfairness of human destinies.

CHAPTER XVIII

CALVIN headed his car up the road that led to the lookout. Persis calculated that he was going to make the circuit of the hilltop, give Jerry a farewell glimpse of the town and the Hudson, and instead of returning past the parsonage, take a road that swung around the other side of the big hill into Bentley, so stopping at the hospital.

When she had watched him out of sight, she had gone to her own room, and from the second-story window had listened to the car climb the hill. Then she heard Calvin let out his speed past the corn patch, and after that she had been able to follow them only in her heart's imaginings. An hour had passed, and no word from Calvin yet! It became suddenly intolerable to her to remain still and alone in the little house; to have the dead weight of her need to watch and listen lifted so entirely off her consciousness was a burden harder to bear than the strain of care. She flew to the telephone and rang up Dr. Gibbs. Yes, he was just starting for the ferry—he would be delighted to have Miss Litchfield meet him at Bentley station—his train arrived shortly after noon. She had hardly hung up the receiver when Calvin called her from the hospital, welcome assurance ringing through his voice. "It's all right! We took a turn around the hill, and when we struck town I told him I had to stop at the Hospital. I asked him to come in and wait for me in room C. He was very amiable—asked for pen and paper —said he'd write while he waited. I thought you'd like room C—in the wing nearest the parsonage. Look out now across fields and see it—second floor—corner room! Don't worry—so far, all's well."

Once more she stepped to the window—the northern wooded

hills that spread out their laps Riverward, the plain stretches of sear meadowlands southerly, and the russet mile of slope from Piety Hill to the townscape had no power to longer hold her loving admiration. The eyes of her heart penetrated the brick corner of a second-story room and fixed themselves on the lonely figure that strove so passionately to find salvation in a barren, doomed fountain pen. All the wide quiet of the old familiar view had become membranous of anguish. She turned from it, and passed into the study.

It was good to enter the room without the sense of trespassing. She even closed the door a bit noisily and shoved a chair, to entirely dispel the need of quiet and prudence. On the window ledge sat the bottle of milk; she estimated that Jerry had taken about a glass of it. This, and what she had given him when he set out with Calvin, was all the food he had taken in twenty-four hours. Two glasses of milk for a man consuming himself with overwork! On one corner of his table sat a cloisonné ash receiver that Sallie had once given him for a Christmas present. It was heaped high with ashes, butts and half-smoked cigars, and trails of misplaced ash mingled over the table top with an accumulation of litter and dust: he had been so irascible lately about his study being cleaned, even when he was out of it. On the other corner of his table sat the bowl of Chinese lilies. They drooped sadly, from need of a drink. Part of their pert leaf-stalks were withered and broken-backed, and the proud, top-most clusters of bloom were shrivelling disconsolately. She plucked off the yellowing leaf-stalks, crumpling them in her nervous hand, and going to the kitchen for a pitcher of water, again immersed the bulbs. She gathered up the chaos of crumpled paper on the floor, paper scribbled over with half finished scraps of thought, and fragments of faulty, riotous ideations. She tried to hold back the tide of her rising emotions by performing these little acts of home care, so dear to her New England soul; but the picture of ruin, the wanton

waste of material, overcame her need of domesticity, and she fled from the study as she had from the scene beyond the library windows. But idleness had become a terror and a menace to her; her hands, as well as her heart, refused to be still. There was a whole vacuous half-hour yet before train time. How should she subdue it? The sweater—she had not touched it since Saturday afternoon. So she sat a few moments listening to the click of her needles as they cleaved up the back of the crimson tubing, and the clock hand crawled down to the half-hour mark. Then she dressed warmly and set off to meet Dr. Gibbs.

Her first inhalations of the frosty air made her head feel giddy. She realised that she had not been out doors for five days—not since the day before Thanksgiving, when she had carried food to the shanty. Could it be less than a week? It seemed decades ago! She wondered if she really were just floating along, merely touching the tops of the frozen hubs with her toetips—if anybody was watching the minister's wife go spinning through the air? But in a few minutes her sense of contact returned to her, and by the time she reached the station, she felt quite normal.

"Won't you come home and dine with me, Dr. Gibbs? I have quite looked forward to this." As the alienist came along the corridor from Jerry's quarters she arose from the sofa in the hospital reception room to meet him, every nerve a-quiver, all her psychic faculties alert to catch the unguarded facial expression, the slightest significant gesture of the scientist, that should betray his real estimation of his patient's case. Even alienists were mortal and might, at times, display by their attitudes some fear or hopelessness that their lips were too well trained to confess.

But Dr. Gibbs met her on her own ground. "Thank you. My office hours prohibit all such pleasures for me. But if Doctor will pardon me," he bowed in deference to the house

physician who had accompanied him to the reception room, "I would like to speak with you a few moments alone. Mrs.—Wadhams and I are very old friends," he added charmingly, as if to offset his failure to include the house doctor in the conference. The young physician ushered them into an inner office, withdrew, and Persis turned to face her fate.

"Sit here, please." He took the chair opposite her. "Would you kindly tell me all you know about your husband's family history, whether any of his people have suffered with an infirmity like his, what caused the death of his parents?"

He held her so firmly by the power of his mentality, that she felt her own waver. She put her hand up to her forehead, and out of the past tried to rake hearsay, facts, that should satisfy him in his quest of pedigree. But only vagueness came to her, and she replied, "I can hardly tell you anything. Like myself, Mr. Wadhams is an orphan—has been since early childhood. I remember his father only as a mute man who died at an early age, shortly after the death of his wife. Of her, I haven't the faintest memory. I know she was a frail, beautiful woman—very nervous. Yes, I think she died of some obscure nervous trouble—brain fever, I think I've heard my husband say."

"Ah—predisposition! These neurotic women, transmitting their curse of nerves to progeny!" The protest was detached, impersonal. His brow contracted in a network of lively speculation. Then he took up his burden and went on. "It gives me unspeakable sorrow to be thus obliged to tell you, Miss Litchfield, that I find your husband's condition quite serious. The rapidity with which, of late, these attacks of mania have alternated with constantly lessening periods of lucidity, would point to an extensive brain lesion."

He waited, as if in dread of driving the blow home too hard. "Of course you know that he has been smoking altogether too much. This circumstance, combined with his unwillingness to eat and his inability to rest, has terminated in a weakened

heart action." Again he paused, this time to choose his words. "My immediate advice to you is leave him here for the present. I have left very explicit directions as to his medication and the different means of feeding him. Regular food, induced sleep, extended rest, and absolute freedom from all disturbing elements, sometimes work marvels of improvement in a case like your husband's."

She understood that he was holding up before her heart a frail phantom of hope. But this phantom hardly held its own with the vigorous body of fact that he had just let loose upon her.

"Do you mean by this last remark that I am not to be allowed to see my husband—here?" She glanced about the square little office with an encompassing look that seemed to sweep down walls and annihilate all places of bondage.

"If your presence has no distressing effect upon the frequency of his mania, you may. Try it and see! Just now, Mr. Wadhams is somewhat perturbed by our recent interview with him. But along towards night, if he should be quiet, I see no reason why you should not be permitted to visit him for a short time."

She was too shrewd to miss inferring from this carefully made statement that at this very moment Jerry was in a paroxysm of range and mania, brought on by finding himself in restraint. She even fancied that through the long corridors she could hear him calling, calling her to come and save him. "Meanwhile go home and try to rest! In the middle of the week I will see your husband again. Feel assured that we will do all in our power for him. Perhaps when I come again I shall be able to give you new hope—I trust so!"

He spoke very gently to her and arose, buttoning his double-breasted coat about his lean, supple figure. But she still held him by query: it had become a necessity for her to see it all clear at last. "Dr. Gibbs, I must get the whole clinical picture! I realise now that always Mr. Wadhams has been of a most

uneven temperment. But he has maintained a certain good balance until very recently, else he would not be in his present position. Tell me—why should these extreme symptoms have developed so rapidly in the last six months?"

The scientist looked at her keenly, and when he replied he lifted the question out of the confines of individualism into the realm of generalities. "I can only tell you that none of us have really proved our sanity until the strong, deep emotions of religion, sex, life, have struck us. If we pass through these great fires of human experience unscathed, if we can stand up against calamity, disappointment, losses, and if the reaction of these vicissitudes upon us has no power to topple over our hearts or our brains, then we may safely consider ourselves balanced and sane. But believe me, the people who dwell on the borderland, ever flitting to and fro across the dusky confines of saneness and lunacy, constitute a mighty host of us poor mortals."

Into his manner had come the great tenderness of understanding, into his voice the blur of the eternal tears of human things. It was as if the burden of mortal woes and cares had suddenly become very heavy for him. He sighed, and turning his magnetic regard upon her sad face, compassionately, addressed his farewell to her.

"Let me urge you to recall the example of the stately elm tree when the winter blasts strike it. Tall, serene, it stands in its proud perfection, but when the storm breaks over it, it sways, gives, bends—almost breaks in the fierceness of the tempest. But when the gale passes, it raises its proud head to its full, commanding height and beauty once again. And this is how I would have you bend now, my dear child—bend, but not break! Good-by!"

He gave her his hand, conducting her back to the reception room, and peering twice at the initials inside his hat, stepped lithely down to his cab.

All the afternoon she sat in her window knitting. Silence entombed the hilltop. When sparrows hopped across her tin roof they sounded like a cavalry charge. Every little while she could hear a sparring flock of these wranglers chattering querulously amongst the barren leaf stalks of the ampelopsis vine that clambered over the adjacent buttresses of the church. While the crimson sweater grew into shapeliness and full extent, she marvelled that heartpain, being so single in itself, could take on so many shades and degrees of ache. She knew that "while happiness was composite, pain was simple, that while it required many things to make a mortal happy, it never required but one to make him suffer." She recalled that only two days ago, when she had not known where Jerry was, she had told herself there was no anxiety like that of uncertainty: but now that she knew precisely where he was she decided there was no anguish capable of matching that of surety.

It occurred to her that she might send for Sallie to come and share her troubles: she had already written to explain that the engagement for the opera must be postponed another week. If any one had asked her why she did not send for her, she would probably have replied that Sallie's father needed her. In reality, what made her shrink from exposing her grief was her immense reticence, her large preferment to suffer in secret, rather than to place it in the light—even of sympathy. She realised that just as soon as she could feel any emotion other than pain—a flutter of hope or a ray of faith—the sharp edge of her suffering would be dulled. But no such grateful visitors came to interrupt her heartache and at last she arose, remembering that Dr. Gibbs had said she might see Jerry toward night. At four o'clock a light river fog and an east wind had begun to drift in over Bentley, and had grown into a bleak, cold drizzle of rain that was now turning to sleet. While half an hour ago the rain had moulded the frozen hubs that stretched between her and the hospital, it was now glazing them with

a coat of ice. As she laid her handiwork down on the foot of the bed, her first thought was to telephone and learn if Jerry was quiet, and then to call a cab. Yes, Mr. Wadhams was quiet, was preoccupied writing: yes, the specialist had left word that she might see him. But she discarded the second part of her intention, assuring herself that as the weather was so entirely in accord with her feelings, she would dress substantially and walk the mile. While she was lacing her heavy boots and collecting various protections from the storm, hope, in her always the robust member of the trio of fundamental graces, reasserted itself over her gloom of calamity. It whispered to her that the best of doctors were sometimes cheated of their fondest diagnosis; that Jerry was too young and too strong to die; that death would be too despotic of God; that a couple of weeks of good food and the care he could not find in his own home—and who could tell? Perhaps they would be going off somewhere to rest yet, although not in the Carolina Mountains. It was very strange that Jim Kimberley had never replied about the hunting lodge. But then, so much of life was strange that a strangeness or two, more or less, hardly counted. And in a world so wide there were plenty of other resting spots—besides Jim Kimberley's!

The east wind had begun to rise, and made sport of her attempts to tack her umbrella. But the storm and the difficult walking, combined with the resurrection of her hope, gave enough resistance to revive her. At the hospital a pretty nurse came to lead her to room C. How the uniform and the medicated odours and the stretch of the corridor, barren even of dust, took her back to the old days at General Hospital! With light step she approached the door of Jerry's room. "Ring when you want to come out—I'm here in the hall," the nurse whispered. The door shut and the key turned so noiselessly under her supple fingers that her patient was undisturbed.

Persis stood a moment facing him, the arch-love of her life

since babyhood. Her hungry eyes roved over him, the object of her whole-hearted, single devotion, in a passion of yearning and protest. He sat before a square-topped oak table, over which a drop light with a vividly green shade was suspended at a convenient angle over his left shoulder. His posture sidewise to the table was one of exceptional grace. He was writing rapidly, easily, his head bent forward slightly, so that his determined chin concealed the absence of necktie. His abundant brown hair looked to her a trifle sunnier in the light of the electric lamp, and rambled across his high forehead in a wavy mane —the mane so dear to his pride back in college football days! The once ruddy tinge on his cheeks had faded to wanness, and their firm contour was markedly sparer; but all the ravage in his countenance was subdued to calm: his mental habits were paramount. He looked as if his mind and spirit had been dismembered from the recent, turbulant, physical part of him, and set in the ascendant. Occasionally his mobile mouth twitched slightly from the angle of his square jaws, and a little frownlike contraction would flit over his forehead, as if in rhythm to some ideation passing through his brain cells and difficult to put in the written word. Could it be that decay was ravaging these same brain cells, laying waste the vital power of the man who looked so normal? All but the eyes! She watched them ever shifting under his dark lashes, racing back and forth across the paper. And was it right for him to breathe so fast and hard?

Then he raised his eyes to her, and the wild, full face light in them drove all hope from her consciousness. But she had not come to make commotion for him; so she smiled, and held out her hands to him, fearing as to what turn his greeting might take.

He arose, his old time charm and chivalry regnant. "Belovedest! So you came." He took her hands, smiling down upon her a moment. Then he started to lead her to a seat,

glancing around the bare room for the small luxuries of home. It was an unfortunate trail of thought, and reminded him of his new surroundings. "Pardon, dear—I'll get you a rocker!" He darted to the door, to find it locked.

He turned back to her with a sudden fury. "Why are we locked in this room, Persis? Tell me at once!"

She hesitated, dreading to excite him by explanation, fearing equally to deny him, so threatening were his tones and attitude. So she took an opposite turn, trusting to the power of suggestion, and asked very mildly: "What thesis are you working on now, Jerry? Is it something new?" And stepping to the table she picked up the poor scribbled page.

He snatched it from her. "Never mind what I'm writing! Tell me—this is the hospital. Am I to be kept here, away from my wife and home—locked in like any maniac?"

It seemed best to her to tell him the truth, since any prevarication, except his own, always aggravated him so. "I want you to stay here, dear, a few days—till you get all better—for me."

"Do you mean to tell me that you consent to my being subjected to indignities and restraint here—kept from all I love best? Can it be that you prove yourself so faithless—cruel—you, the girl I chose to be my wife?"

For the moment she could not answer him, he stood over her so like the black wraith of judgment.

"Remember—darling—it's for the best—it is not for long—very soon we—" Her voice failed her, and helpless in the grip of her emotions, she waited till she could regain it.

He looked at her and for the moment the wild expression in his eyes changed to one of reproach and grief. "No, it is not for long," he muttered, "it is not for long!"

He began to pace about the little room, but the effort was becoming too much for him, and presently he sat down in the nearest chair. He put his elbows on his knees, resting his head

in his hands. She wondered if it was physical exhaustion or grief at her seeming treachery that was crushing him so low. The sight of his prostration and the hopelessness of bringing him to rational view was too intolerable to her. She decided to go, to leave him, before she brought on another attack of mania. The rain and sleet beat against the window-pane and under pretext of looking out at the storm she stepped to the window, ringing the bell for the nurse as she passed.

"I must go now, darling." She stooped to touch her lips to the poor, bowed head.

He glanced up at her. "You will go home—and leave me here—alone—without you?"

"Don't, Jerry! And don't grieve! I'll come again in the morning, early."

He arose and gathered her in his arms—ah, surely this was lucidity! He pressed his trembling lips to her eyes, her forehead, her mouth, in his old farewell symbol of commending her to God's keeping. "I wouldn't leave you—like this—girl of mine," he whispered. "I would forego heaven and defy hell before I'd leave you! But perhaps they drive you to it—I must not judge—must not judge! But there's just one thing for you to remember—belovedest—down the centuries—for all time. I love you—love you—better than anybody or any thing on earth—better than myself—my work—my God! I think you are—" The click of the key turning in the lock took him from her. She drew his face down to hers and returned his salutation in the sign of the cross.

"Try to eat—try to rest! A good night's sleep to you—darling! Till morning—good-by!"

The door opened softly and she slipped out into the hall. "Thank you," she said to the nurse who helped her on with her wraps. "And now will you do me another kindness? Please ring for a cab, and ask the house doctor to see that Mr. Wadhams has something to make him sleep to-night. Of course,

you would telephone me if there is any change. Good-night!"

It was grateful to find a fire in the library, after the dismal drive. She warmed herself by it a moment before passing to her room, to replace her damp clothing with dry garments. Dinner had been ready for the past ten minutes, the Swedish woman had intimated when her mistress came in. The house gown had too many hooks on it: she hurried into a simple one of white and went down to her solitary meal.

After dinner a morris chair by the library fireplace had invited her to rest; but instead she turned to her knitting. A few more hours of work and the sweater would be finished! She renewed the fire with a hemlock log: the snap and crackle would be company. And before she settled down she raised the south window shade, peering out across the black mile to the corner room below. The thickness of the storm prevented her distinguishing Jerry's window, but she could see a row of lights along the wing of private rooms. The glow from them across the dark cheered her, and to be in touch with it, she left her own shade up. Leaning her face against the cool, rain-splashed window-pane, she prayed that all would go well with Jerry through the night.

An hour passed. The warmth from the fireplace, as she sat facing it, added torpor to her weariness. The bulk of the sweater weighted down her hands; the needles slipped from her fingers. She leaned her head against the cushions of the morris chair, and slept.

She awoke, startled, tremulous—someone had called her, "Persis? Persis?" She listened. Perhaps the hall clock had roused her: it was chiming eleven. The fire had died down low, and her thin gown hardly kept the chill of the room from her. The echo of the call still rang through her consciousness—"Persis? Persis?" Surely it was Jerry! Something must be troubling him to make him call her like that. She

jumped up, the mass of crimson in her lap falling to the rug, and making a side screen of her hands to shut out the lamplight, ran to the window. A strong wind was touring the ridge of the Palisades, and splashed rainy gusts against the pane, spitefully. She searched across the night for her landmark. The light in the corner room had gone out.

But while she stood by the window, heart-still and chilled with fear, from out of the dark and the storm there came two lights, advancing so surely, swiftly upon the little hill house, that they riveted her attention. At the foot of the hill they stopped, and she recognised them as the lamps on Calvin Darrach's car. She went to meet him; it seemed hours before she heard his step on the porch. She opened the door for him, and a gust of fine raindrops swept in before him, lodging on her gown. The fur of his coat was thick with mist, and his eyes and voice were thick with the news he had brought her.

"Don't say it," she whispered. "I know already!"

He did not gainsay her, but taking off his coat, shook the dampness from it, and hung it over the back of a chair. He followed her to the fireplace, and noticing how thin her gown was, stooped over to rake up the coals and add a fresh log. He toyed with the paper and the ashes, his back toward her, dreading, putting off the word he must give her. How like her it was, he thought, to be the calm one of them!

"I did not get home from business till very late," he said. She knew that the reason why he was late was because he had spent so much of his morning with Jerry, just as she knew that he offered the words to explain why she had not heard from him earlier. "Just as soon as I had some dinner I went to him, and I've been with him ever since, till—" and remembering her request he added, "till I came to tell you about it."

She shut her eyes, as one shuts them involuntarily, seeing a blow coming. "I know," she said. "I heard him call me as he passed me by—I hear him yet."

She put up both hands, as if to shut out the sound of the wail, swerved slightly, and would have fallen in a deep faint, had not Calvin caught her in his arms. The proud, beautiful head dropped on his shoulder, unresisting at last: she had always been so intangible! He held her so a moment, in exultant possession of her, jealous of the time when he must put her down. He had, too, a strange feeling of exhilaration in that she had carried her faint through to its consummation. He had spent so many days of his life tending threatened ailments, faints that never took place! He gazed down upon her, satisfied in that he had triumphed over the *noli me tangere* with which she had always surrounded herself. But instantly his sense of responsibility and care returned to him, and lifting her across the room, he laid her tenderly on the couch, amongst the soft gray shadows. He took the cold hands in his own, and for the first time noticed how chill the room was—far too chill for a child in a thin white gown. He laid his cheek down to her lips, and they too, were very cold. He glanced about the room for a slumber robe, an afghan, something to put over her, but he found nothing portable. He went for his fur coat, but it was still too damp. Not a sign of a wrap in sight! Never a man of one resource, he seized the couch by one end and rolled it in front of the fireplace. Then he lifted her gently so that the warmth shone directly over her, and discarding the pillows, lowered her head. He had not nursed a pampered wife for eight years without learning what to do when a woman fainted. Chafing her chill hands in his great, warm ones, he waited, expecting her revival momently, all his pent capacity for tenderness and demonstrative care overflowing on the unconscious woman before whom he knelt. Once in his pity of her he wished that she might never wake up, but lie, still and beautiful, forever oblivious of suffering and grief. Then she maintained such a prolonged swoon that fear seized him lest his wish had been answered, and he hurried to the kitchen for

some cold water. Returning to find her still deathlike, he sprinkled the cold drops on her face, and presently the transparent eyelids fluttered, her lips parted in an inhaled sigh, and she looked up at him.

"You dear, to come back!" he murmured. Then he was glad she was still too dazed to understand him, and held the glass to her lips. The drink revived her. She glanced down at the unfamiliar position of the couch, at her own proneness, and drew herself up to a sitting posture.

"I must have fainted—'tisn't like me to behave so."

She was apologising to him for having swooned in his presence.

He sat down on the couch beside her. "Poor child! You're worn out! 'Twas your body that fainted—not your spirit."

She put her right elbow on her knee, leaning her head in her hand wearily, her face turned to him. "Tell me about it—I can bear it now. What happened after I left?"

Again he marvelled at her, so quiet and resigned in this her supremest grief. The firelight played over her still, white face, giving it a semblance of colour and life. Even with the details of his story thronging upon him, he was conscious of her poise and beauty. "After you left Jerry returned to his writing till the hour came for him to take nourishment. This he refused to do, and by the time the doctors and nurses were through with him, he was much prostrated for a couple of hours. Then he insisted on writing again—said he had something very special to say. It seemed best to let him write—all resistance was sure to bring on an attack of mania. So they allowed him to get up and sit by the table, looking in upon him every little while. The last time—they found him, lying face downward on the bed, quite still. Doctor was on hand—everything was done—I was there myself and saw them working over him. But nothing availed, dear—'twas his heart. These repeated attacks had worn him out!

"They wanted to send for you—but there was nothing left to do—so I spared you that. I looked around his room for the last bits of him I thought you would treasure most and I brought you these." From his inside coat pocket he produced Jerry's fountain pen and his last page of written words, and laid them on her lap. Her eyes lingered on the page, trying to draw some word of comfort, some ray of coherency, from the poor mass of chaos. There were bits of his sermons, scraps of texts, scattered keynotes of religion, and trailing off obliquely across the foot of the page, the last line barely legible, was,

> "Some measure Love by gold,
> By endless time, by boundless sea,
> But I—I love you well enough to leave you
> If need must be."

Hot, sudden tears splashed on the page. She handed it to Calvin, and when he came to the last line, his own tears fell freely and mingled with hers.

The hour stretched on. Silence fell. From Bentley station, through the dampness, came the shrill whistle of the south-bound train, the same train that only a week ago had borne Jerry off on his pitiful, aimless wandering somewhere about Savannah. To-night a less earthly train had borne him off. And her great love told her that its schedule was sure, and its destination free from all abstraction and delusion.

She sat with her fingers laced across her right knee, her head tilted back, face and throat foreshortened in the firelight, mute, calm, submissive. The hall clock striking midnight startled her back to the present. "You must go," she said. "How Nellie will be worrying about you! No," as she saw his rising protest at the thought of leaving her so alone. "Let me be alone to-night—I can bear it. But first thing in the morning send for Sallie. Tell her to come—prepared to stay with me —till I go."

She made him wait while she heated a glass of milk (her panacea for all hardships and all ills!) protesting that he needed it, going out into the cold and the storm. While she was in the kitchen Calvin reflected that in the early part of his life he had met many women who offered him wine cups; that of late years his experiences had centred around females who drank large quantities of tea; but never before had he met a woman who so unfailingly served glasses of milk. He wondered if the instinct was of her nurse's training, or of her inherent solicitude? Whatever it was, he adored her for it, and because in this, her hour of anguish, she was still able to command consideration for somebody besides herself. And especially he adored her for spending her thoughtfulness on him. He let her hold the glass for him, while he shook himself into his great fur coat. Then he drank her beverage and left her on the windy hilltop, alone with her woe and her love.

CHAPTER XIX

LIE here, dear—never mind the packing for a little while! Try to rest—that's a dear." Sallie stroked the pillows to inviting plumpness. "Now—shall I rub your head, or read aloud to you—or shall I subside into absolute quietude?"

She drew the window shade down to a protecting line, and gathering up the long plain folds of black skirt, laid them across the thin limbs. Heavens—how thin they were! The whole body was nothing but the shadow of its old beautiful self. These long, plain lines in a gown would never do, accentuating unlovely angles like this! She must see to it that her child was provided with fluffy materials, something that took to plaits and puckers, and that shirred well around the hips and the chest.

Persis, with a weary sigh, yielded to these ministrations. She cared so little how she looked, being covered and neat, that Sallie's innovations sounded to her like the merest childish prattle. Once or twice she had caught sight of her own grief-mottled face and black gown in the cheval glass, and wondered who the strange woman in her room was. And then it occurred to her that she should not have seemed a stranger to herself. She lay now on the couch in her room; her hands, transparent, idle at last, drooped listlessly across her gown, her face turned to the wall. Sallie sat down in a rocker close beside her. Silence fell between them: there was nothing left to say. They had met the wave of parish sympathy, consolation notes, and offers of help with adequate disposal. They had gone over the last pitiful details together, had wept over them, and tried to struggle up into the plain where all seemed for the best. Through all this necessary and acute stage, Sallie had stood by, tactful, loving in her care and cheer. Now the reaction of

grief had set in, and the utter apathy, the willessness, the torpidity of drained life-springs was having its way with Persis. She lay so quiet and lifeless that involuntarily Sallie watched for her breath.

Already packers were at work dismantling the little home. They were downstairs now, in the study, packing Jerry's books. All the muslin window draperies on the first floor had been taken down, and through the white shades the winter sun, in the short-lived brightness of its midday glow, shone mercilessly on the gray wall paper, accentuating the patches where once pictures and ornaments had hung. Over the fireplace, empty except for a half-charred log and a shovelful of ashes, was a long, rectangular spot of bright paper, that marked off the dimensions of the Botticelli "Spring." The magic-clad damsels had passed on out of sight, like the boy who had so lightheartedly hung them in the protection of his chimney corner. A barrel, the same barrel that the minister had so amiably unheaded for his wife six months ago, stood in the middle of the library, packed full of excelsior and copper ornaments, waiting to be sealed for freightage. From time to time the blows of a hammer resounded through the quiet of the house, as a workman fitted a crate to some choice piece of furniture.

Presently Persis turned away from the wall, and opening her eyes said, with a wan smile, "Talk to me, Sallie. It will help drown the noise."

"What shall I say, dear heart? Shall I just babble on, making up things out of my own brain? Or shall I read 'Alice in Wonderland'?" Of late Sallie had found that when other books failed, the over-taxed mind could lose sight of facts in this maze of charming unrealities.

"No, I'm tired of Alice just now! I want to talk about somebody real. Tell me about Jim Kimberley."

Sallie started. A deep flush passed over the quaint, plastic little face; and she hesitated. In a moment she said, "There

isn't anything more to tell. He went home Thanksgiving night, after he left me."

Persis laid her hand on Sallie's knee. "There are one or two things I want to feel sure you understand, Sallie—otherwise you might feel hurt."

"You could never hurt me!"

She sighed wearily, "That night—Thanksgiving night—when you and Jim telephoned me from New York, did you think me inhospitable and queer because I would not let you come up to Bentley to call?"

"No,—yes—yes, I did," Sallie stammered. "But we decided that it was because you and Jerry were so very happy in your first Thanksgiving together that you could n't bear to be disturbed. We understood!"

"Sallie dear—I was all alone—stark, utterly alone—all that hideous day! Jerry had gone off somewhere—without telling me—he stayed a whole week—off South somewhere. I couldn't bear to have you and Jim see me—I was so ashamed—and so sad."

The bitter words came slowly. Sallie bent over and kissed the hand that rested on her knee. "You poor, poor child, to suffer like that on a holiday! And to think that I added to your torment! If I had known I never should have—I never should have telephoned to you."

"Oh yes, I suffered. There is little doubt about that—look at my hands!"

She held one up, and Sallie took it impulsively. "Never mind, child; when I take you home with me, you will soon gain."

After a moment, she went on. "There is something else—one more confession—while we're straightening things out. Way back when I first began to see that Jerry was going to break down if he didn't have rest, I did something—I've never told you about. Once Jim—in his letter from his hunting lodge—when he went there after his dreadful accident—remember?

—said that he hoped sometime Jerry and I would visit him in the mountains. Well, when Jerry refused to go away for a rest, I thought, perhaps if I could—I thought the idea of a hunting lodge would captivate him so, I could get him started. I wrote to Jim—I tried to write a very nice note—telling him about Jerry's poor health, and I asked him to rent his lodge for a month—from Thanksgiving till Christmas. And Sallie, he never even answered my note."

Sallie sat very rigidly, with a look of alarm about her, and in a stiff frightened voice inquired, "Where on earth did you send that note?"

"I sent it to his home, outside of Boston, where I always send your letters, when you visit the Kimberleys. Why do you suppose he snubbed me so? It wasn't queer of me to ask him to rent it, was it?"

"No—certainly not—I don't believe he ever got your letter—he was probably off somewhere—you know how he flies about the country! He wasn't home!"

"Yes, but he was home! You said so in one of your notes. I made sure of that!"

Sallie sighed. With a gesture of dismissal, she waived the subject. Whenever any combination of circumstances grew too complex for Sallie to settle easily, she was apt to dismiss them; she did not take naturally to difficulties.

"It's too much for me, dear! Usually Jim is most punctilious about his correspondence. But rest assured about this point—he never meant to hurt your feelings."

"My feelings don't matter, Sallie. It's the bearing it all had on Jerry. Do you know, I'm haunted with the idea—I can't sleep nights from thinking that if I hadn't wasted so much time waiting to hear from Jim Kimberley—that if I had taken Jerry off on that trip, I might have spared him this awful fate." She turned her face piteously to Sallie, waiting, wanting to be reassured.

"Put the idea from you, child! Those things are beyond our direction. It was Jerry's turn to go! And whatever you did—nothing would have availed."

"Yes—but sometimes God gives us chances! If we are too stupid or too careless to seize them, the opportunity to stem the tide of disaster passes us by."

"Don't—Persis! You have no right to torture yourself so! You need every spark of your energy now to get well. It's your ruthless, New England habit of self-blame, that direful capacity for self-revilement, that is haunting you!"

"All the same, Sallie, if Jim Kimberley had answered my note, I believe I could have saved Jerry. Even his refusal to let us have the lodge would have done it. For then I should have felt free to look about for something else. As it was I dilly-dallied long, wasting the precious days, expecting Jim's reply every mail hour. Finally Jerry got so much worse that he wouldn't go—things closed in upon me—and I had let the golden chance slip by, till it was too late, too late!"

"Don't—you must not blame yourself! I can't bear to hear you talk like this," and Sallie put her fingers to her ears.

"I blame myself—I always shall blame myself—and I hate Jim Kimberly!"

The emphasis the words carried seemed out of proportion to the frail body. Sallie left her side and went over to the window seat. "You do Jim a big injustice," she finally said hoarsely. "I shall write to him to-day and ask him to explain. He would have replied to you, had he been home."

"His explanation will not count with me now!" The firm lips snapped together. And Sallie, who had come to dread the inert attitude, the apathy of her friend, was glad to see left in the thin figure so much of feeling.

The next morning Persis sat down at her desk to go over a pile of memoranda and bills. Presently Sallie entered the room, dressed in her street clothes. In one hand she held a

plump letter, stamped and sealed, and altogether there was a air of business-like enterprise about her quite the opposite of indolence. She stooped over, kissed Persis on the forehead and said, "While you're busy with accounts, dear, I'm going out to mail this letter to Jim. Can I do any errands for you?"

"No, thank you—I've ordered everything we'll need. Take a good long walk, dear—you need some fresh air. How I have drained you this past week! Poor Sallie!"

"Poor nothing," Sallie protested. "Can't a tennis champion stand up under a week of what really is her greatest pleasure in the world—helping Persis? I think I'll drop in on Nell a minute—if you'll promise me to keep busy for an hour. Do you know, I think it very strange that Nell hasn't been up to see you through all this! She's selfish, of course, and doesn't like to be 'depressed.' But it strikes me that if she is going to embroider any emblems on the fabric of her friendship for you, now is her time to get at it."

"Hush, Sallie! Nellie's idea of friendship doesn't share unhappiness and misfortune. This you know, as well as I do. And besides, she couldn't comfort me now! To comfort, one must feel. And Nellie simply can't feel—except for herself."

"Anyway, I'm going to call on her. Think of it—a whole week in Bentley, and not a glimpse of my dear, delectable, blond cousin, Mrs. Calvin Darrach! First I know she'll be chiding me with indifference to family ties and obligations!"

Promptly an hour later Sallie returned, flushed from her walk, animated by some piece of hidden news. "By the great horned dace of the mystic Ganges!" she announced, breathlessly, dropping into the edge of Persis's bed, unmindful of her ermine muff, that wabbled out of her lap and deposited intself in the dust and ashes about the fireplace.

Persis glanced up from her check-book. "My dear, put aside all such trifling and insignificant articles as checks! Come over

here on the couch and try to guess what Nell is up to now! I'll give you three chances!"

"She has been toilfully and painstakingly shielding herself from the onslaught of grippe all the fall. Has the wily beast tracked her to her sheltered lair at last?"

"No! Good guess, though! Try again!"

"She has periodical spells of half-decisions—threats—about going back to housekeeping again, 'just to please Cal.' Usually these attacks end in a change of boarding houses. Can it be that she has grown dare-devil enough to open up her house?"

"No! Worse, and more of it!" Sallie chuckled. "But I do see her eventually ousted from her niche in a fashionable boarding-house, and forced into her own home at last, in spite of herself."

"I can't guess again. Tell me!"

"No—you must guess! What would keep Nell away from New York and her friends all the fall?"

"As far as I am concerned, her dread of gloom! Ever since things have gone ill with me, she has assiduously avoided me."

"Naturally! A woman would—under such circumstances."

Persis looked hurt. "Tell me," she said. "I'm too sick to be teased!"

The childishness of this defence made Sallie smile. "Very well, I will! For the first time in her life, Nell is gloriously consistent! She's pampering herself now—for the sake of her baby."

A long slow look, first of unbelief, then of surprise, then of wistfulness, passed over Persis's face. Her lips quivered and she put her head down amongst the couch pillows.

"How unjust we've been—and how I envy her!"

It was Sallie's turn to be surprised. "Persis! Haven't you enough burdens without that?"

"With that, the rest would not be burdens. To think of Jerry gone—irrevocably, for always—with no slightest visible,

palpable bit of him left to me—just memory—faint reflexes—shadows! I could bear the rest—but this—this *is* grief! I can understand God coveting Jerry. But to leave me so alone—is too much—I had waited so long for it."

Sallie sat helpless in the protest of tears and sobs. At last she realised that it was not well to let anguish go so far. She took the poor hands in her own firmly and said, very gently, "Dear, listen to Sallie—just a moment! Think—would you like to have a son and some day stand aside and watch him go the way of his father? Could you ever bear it to know that you had helped to pass on the curse of insanity to some irresponsible being?"

The sobs that shook the girl beside her ceased a little. Sallie went on. "Could you bear all the long, lonely, responsible years of his childhood, youth, manhood, with the perpetual uncertainty, the ghastly fear, hanging over you that some day this dreadful taint was going to crop out in your son's brain, and smite him low, too? Think how his slightest idiosyncrasy would torment you—you with a knowledge of diseases! You'd hover over his little individual peculiarities, his queernesses, his nerves, and you'd magnify them into symptoms until they would haunt every waking moment you knew! Think what it would mean to live a lifetime with the curse of heredity hanging only a thousandth part of an inch over your heart!"

Persis made no answer, but she stopped weeping. Sallie, determined to have the issue settled for always, continued. "Isn't it enough that you have had your ideas and your ideals of love fulfilled? Think what you have had—the best of Jerry from babyhood—love, companionship, youth, devotion—wifehood—everything but motherhood he brought you! In these past six months you've had more than thousands of women have in a lifetime! in the face of all this would you seize upon motherhood so greedily—when there is such a sure, awful penalty put upon it, and the penalty you would be asking

somebody else to pay? No! You wouldn't be so selfish, Persis. Instead, you'd be thankful for what you have had—thankful there is no more."

The lonely heart and the grief-blurred mind reacted to Sallie's words at last. It was the first time she had looked ahead—she, with her gift of foresight! She had lost her sense of perspective, while bearing the burden of the immediate present—had been blinded by her constant and absolute need of somebody to love, somebody to serve, to depend on her, and fill in the gaps and void of Jerry's absence. In her blind, instinctive craving to perpetuate the great love she and Jerry had borne each other, she had failed to see and measure results.

She sat up on the edge of the couch, not realising that she was passing the milestone of renunciation on the road of her soul's progress. "Sallie, I believe you're right! I see it all—now. But dear God, how my heart aches!"

"Never mind the ache—all ache stops, in time! Better have your heart ache now than break when you're fifty. Be thankful—instead of achy!! Get down on your knees and say you're thankful! That's what I did when I heard how things had gone with you."

However, the proud Persis did nothing of the kind; but where a little while ago she had felt that her destiny was too harsh to be borne, she now accepted her lot resignedly: which, after all, is the lesson that wisdom tries so hard to teach us.

"Sallie, you're all I have left. I couldn't get along without you!"

"You'll never have to," drawled Sallie. "We need each other, and we'll pull together as long as life lasts us. You must try to eat some luncheon now. Afterwards I'm going to take you for a little walk."

After luncheon Persis protested that she must oversee the sorting of the linen, the packing of the trunks—that she would rather not go out to walk till sunset time. So when the little

church spire jutted up into a glare of burnt orange, the two girls took the hill road, hoping to watch the colour pageant from the broad open space of the cornfield. But half way up the hill, Persis turned to Sallie with "Let's go back, dear! I would rather see it all in memory."

So they faced the after-glow, and everywhere Persis looked, the landscape southward, the defining ridge of Palisades, the village scene, the giant elms behind the vine-sheltered church, the old white pine standing sentinel over the little stucco parsonage, all of Nature that Bentley embraced, seemed identified with her intimate, deep experiences. The people of Bentley? How little she would miss them, how little she had entered into their lives, how effectually she had kept them from tracking through her heart! Excepting the Darrachs, there was hardly any of the parishioners, barring, perhaps, Elder Gaylord and Miss Atwood, whom she would recognise if she met them next month on Broadway. Was it because six months was too short a time for her to become attached to them, or had she busied her heart so entirely with her home life that there was no room left in it for outsiders?

Whether she turned her eyes in the opposite direction, or closed them, there stood the hill-house always, with its associations of tenderness, yearning and half-acomplishment. Ah, well: the stoppage was short now. And there was always Sallie at her elbow, buoying her up, assuring her that they were "going home to-morrow."

A sharp realisation that she must take her last, full look at the dear hill road for always away with her now, challenged her shrinking. She turned impulsively, and where a moment before she would not go, she now climbed eagerly. Presently they came to the spot where the road paused, rested by the cornfield, and then took to the hill again. Of the corn patch nothing remained except ugly, soiled stubble; the pumpkins and the stacks had long since been garnered. All along by the road

side, in the southern branches especially of the oaks, a light crisp wind fried and sizzled. To Persis the rustle of leaves spoke in falsetto whispers, reminding her of the day Calvin had overtaken her in his car—the same day that Jerry had begun his strange peregrinations, and she had been so very angry with him. Farther on, the ramshackle outlines of the little hut recalled the day she had tried to carry relief to the man there—her one spasmodic indulgence in altruism, during all her stay in Bentley.

Suddenly an amber sheen lighted up the hemisphere of sky before her. Instinctively she looked back. The sun had sagged to within a foot of the earth, and through the purpling trunks of the bare lean trees, glared like some brazen, one-eyed creature glowering at her through the bars of his cage.

She stood silent, absorbed, fixing the physical features of the December picture in her heart. Then without dwelling on details, she hurried back to the house. But here details clutched her again, despite her momently renewed attempts to be oblivious. The Swedish woman had already lighted a hall gas-jet; Persis, sidling past the mass of boxes and barrels, shut her eyes to the stripped library. But some one had left the study door open, and almost against her will, she stepped into the dismantled sanctuary. Of all the small ornaments nothing remained except the bowl of Chinese lilies; against the faint twilight of the west window, lop-leaved and lifeless, they stood in silhouette.

She hurried from them on upstairs, glad of the cheer of the fireplace in her room. The Swedish woman, with the automatism of her kind and race, had gone on building a fire at five o'clock—as long as matches remained in the kitchen and bricks on the hearth. Persis paused before the warmth, hands outstretched, watching the firelight flicker through her transparent fingers. Then she turned to lay off her wraps, and there on the foot of her bed lay a heap—some dark object,

indistinct in the half-light. She stooped over it, laid her hand upon it, and the ribbed familiar surface sent a thrill through her. It was the sweater, the unfinished, dearly wrought sweater. She took it to the firelight; its colour carried her back over their college years together. She spread it out across her thin knees, its proportions perfect, except for its armlessness. The sight of it rent her feelings as nothing about the torn-up house could have done. She could pack like a hero: a dozen times a day Sallie stopped to call her "the brave child." But this familiar, intimate thing, so sentient of Jerry, his athletics, his boyish devotion to Harvard symbols, his unbounded appreciation of his wife's handiwork—the half-done gift so typical of their life together, stirred up her depths of woe again. Where had it come from? In the tumult and the conflicting emotions of the past week she had totally forgotten it. She tried to recall where she had left it last, and remembered that she had it in her lap the night she had fallen asleep, to be awakened by the wail of Jerry's call. When she had jumped up to look out of the window she must have dropped it, and the Swedish woman cleaning the library next morning must have found it. Where had she kept it all the week, reserving it in secret to thrust back on her mistress at the last moment? Why hadn't she been merciful enough to let it pass?

Her intention, doubtless, was good and faithful; but had her bungling been premeditated it could hardly have seemed to Persis more diabolical.

From the foot of the stairs Sallie was calling her to come to dinner. She laid the sweater back on the bed and went down to the dining room, unable to eat. The evening finally passed; there were odd bits of packing that needed personal care, and several of the parishioners came in with last offers of help and farewells. At last the girls were free to retire, and Persis, declining all offers of ministrations, said good night. She wanted the last hours all to herself, and Sallie understood.

Closing the door of her room softly, she turned to face the bare walls, with nothing but the half-finished garment of her toil and love to fill her empty heart. Gathering it in her arms, she crouched down before the fireplace. She laid her head on it, kissed it, fondled it, as if it had been some sentient, responsive thing.

The hearth, the blaze, the offering in her arms suggested a sacrifice. She pushed the logs together to make a pyre of them, renewing them with fresh kindlings at their base. When the blaze licked up the sooty flue, kissing the crimson offering many times and passionately, she laid it on the flames. It blanketed them instantly, smouldering for a moment. Then a puff of smoke and smudge floated out from under it and rolled back in her face unpleasantly. She tiptoed across the shadowy, empty room and opened a window opposite. With reëstablished draught and sickish odour of burning wool, the flames crept out around the edges of the bulky mass, infolded it, and finally reduced it to a cake of char. She propped up one end of this with a bit of kindling; the ventilated blaze sucked around it, and presently all that was left of her offering was a shrivelled, shapeless bit of crust on the top of the glowing mass of living coals. Unconscious of how like she was to the legendary women who consulted firelight in order to read the augury of their futures, she gazed long into the embers. But so real and so acute was her sense of loss, that she failed to see how the object of her love and labour had fed and quickened the sacrificial blaze till underneath lay a glowing bed of living fire.

CHAPTER XX

THE next afternoon saw the last of the moving vans passing up and down Piety Hill. If a December afternoon is of an observant nature, it might also have seen many curious eyes stationed at neighbouring front windows, watching for the time when the minister's young wife and "her girl friend from Jersey" should pass out of the parsonage door for the last time and seat themselves in the cab that met the four o'clock train for New York.

About half an hour before this climax took place, Sallie encountered her friend as she sat on a corner of a trunk sewing up a rip in a new pair of black gloves, with remonstrant tones. "Really, Persis, you should, you know! It looks indifferent and heartless."

Persis shook her head sadly and stitched on. Her attitude implied that she was impervious to appearances—except those of her gloves.

"People will comment on it and be hurt. There's the telephone still—'twouldn't take but a few minutes! Won't you let me find the numbers for you, dear?"

The firm lips did not relax. "If you'll pardon me, Sallie, I'd rather not."

"For once, dear, let me guide you! Remember that I have the advantage of spectatorship, while you are an actor in what will surely be interpreted as a very haughty little drama."

But the white lips only closed the more tightly, and Sallie began to realise that a will which had been capable of such bravery might also be impenetrable to persuasion.

"I'm no hypocrite, Sallie! And I'm not going to spend these last few sacred moments of my home saying vapid nothings to

these Bentleyites. They've never liked me! They worshipped Jerry, but they merely tolerated me."

"Nonsense! You never gave them the opportunity to know you—you held them off," replied Sallie, with her faculty of striking sparks of truth on her flint of wit.

"They mean nothing to me! Every one of them is connected in my mind with some disagreeable circumstance. I don't want anybody but you, Sallie. Let me go home in peace, and when I'm rested and settled a bit, I'll write them all notes —that's enough."

"I beg of you to at least ring up Elder Gaylord and Miss Atwood, Persis, if for nothing more than appearance's sake." Sallie, with her traits of geniality and good-fellowship, had become quite friendly with these two members of Jerry's parish during the week Persis had sent her downstairs to receive their calls by proxy. Sallie, graciously apologetic for her friend's non-appearance, charming, hospitable as always, had made very amiable impressions on this elderly couple, particularly on Miss Atwood, who, mindful of Sallie's gift to her foreign missonary society, bubbled over with the effervescence of gratitude and thanks. It was equally natural, too, for Sallie to enjoy being heroised; so the two hit it off quite agreeably.

Persis dropped her mending and fixed Sallie with an imperious look. "All along—so far—I've been brave—haven't I?"

"You've been a Spartan!"

"I haven't asked you or anybody else to bear anything for me that I should bear myself—have I?"

"You certainly have not! You've put your shoulder to it nobly."

"Very well! I've reached my limit now. If you insist on my encountering Miss Atwood I shall go to pieces in a nervous tantrum! her 'holier than thou' would send me into collapse."

So Sallie had to subdue herself to a will superior, and pres-

ently the driver began to load their luggage into the cab. The Swedish woman, her broad, clock-faced countenance buried in one corner of her blue gingham apron, came out on the piazza to see them off: after all, the minister's wife had been a just woman to work for and a good home was being lost just as winter was setting in. In a burst of generous feeling, and out of respect for the young minister, she had volunteered to stay on another day and clean up things a bit.

The two friends stepped into the cab and turned to say a last good-by to the sobbing woman in the doorway. And Persis, with eyes closed lest she turn them back, gave herself to the motion of the cab as it jogged down Piety Hill.

. . . . . .

Mid-March was hailing spring in New Jersey one morning when she awoke with the refreshing sense of complete rest. Already the sun was frisking over the top of her coverlet and bobbing over the flower-splashed wallpaper opposite. Raising herself up on one elbow she peered out the east window into the rose garden, where Robert, the Howes' man, was busy scratching around the rose bushes and pruning stray hips on the wild briers. Along the farther retaining wall a clump of young magnolias were beginning to plump out in bulky, wadded buds, and down the avenue red blood was already showing in the tips of maple boughs. Across her charmed vision flashed a dazzle of blue light, and momently a thrill of glad song from a forsythia bush signalled a bluebird.

But what held her attention was the reflection of herself in the big mirror opposite the bed. The three months had wrought improvement in her looks and in her feelings; Sallie's loving ministrations had tided her over the sorrowful holidays. The godsend of perfect peace in the Howe homestead, the absence of all grief-ridden objects, Sallie's unique, quaint cheer, added to her own willingness to renounce, and the plasticity of

her youth, had all shared in her up-building. As she contrasted her present contours, visible through the thinness of her nightgown, with the jaded, haggard, angular images that the cheval glass used to give, as she heard the undercurrent of challenge and invitation in the spring sounds outside her window, she told herself that it was good to be care-free, to have life enough left to break trail somewhere in a new land, where endeavour was effectual and hazards open.

But before she had time to blaze a far trail or sight many landmarks in this new country of her returning inclination, there came a light tap on her door, and Sallie's droll little face peered in.

"Ah, you are awake! And how rested you look, child! Don't stir!" as Persis made a move to get out of bed. "Nora is bringing your breakfast. Here—let me fix the wash bowl for you."

Sallie, alert to spare her exertion of any kind, unfolded a fresh towel and went to fetch hot water, glad and happy in the service.

"Thank you, Sallie. But really, I can't let you go on breathing and living for me! The spring gives back my courage. In a few days I'm going to plan something to do—to keep my mind off myself."

"Don't delude yourself! You're going to stay right on here with me! Meanwhile, here's your breakfast."

Persis finished the fruit, the dainty chop, the toast, and pushing the tray to one side, folded her hands across the coverlet. "I've just been thinking, Sallie, that for two girls who mean right and who would do our share, Destiny has played strange tricks with our men. We're both in the same boat, dear. There is some terrible 'Shalt not' set upon our loves. It must all mean that we are intended for something else."

"I am, surely! Already do I see 'Miss Howe' being chiselled on my tombstone! But you were fashioned for love."

Instantly Sallie regretted her frankness. Why pull up the poor, planted feelings when their roots were still tenacious of the ground? The sadness that passed over the face, so rested and fresh a moment ago, made her curse her mistake. She put a kiss on the sunny hair that hung over Persis's shoulder in a braid. "Never mind, dear! I have a little 'sprise for you."

There was such evident, genuine intent to divert, that Persis gave herself up to the magic that Sallie was always able to put into her favourite word. She had learned the wisdom of grasping at even small straws, if only they floated in a current divergent from that of her sorrow.

Sallie stepped across the hall to her own room, returning with her hands behind her. Persis smiled, knowing what was expected of her.

"I can't guess," she said. "Tell me at once."

"I will! This morning's mail brought me a letter from Jim Kimberley. In it was this note for you."

She handed Persis the surprise. The note was undated. A heavy coat of arms in black and gold surmounted the script, which somehow, when she contrasted it with Jim's other note, the one he sent on his way to the hunting lodge, seemed strangely unfamiliar. There had been times when aside from hating him for the part he had played in Jerry's tragedy, she had felt piqued that he had passed by her loss without a word of sympathy. It had come at last, short and characteristic of the man. She re-read it, greedily.

"My Dear Persis:—

"After Thanksgiving (after Sallie and I telephoned you that night) I ran over to London to do a little shopping. I've just returned—to be shocked by the news of your cruel loss. 'Tisn't right, dear—God really shouldn't do such things. It's too much like the tyranny of man to man. It's non-understandable and thrillingly sad. Believe me, my heart aches for you.

"About that other matter, Sallie will explain to you. (I can't bear

to mingle any such a piece of bungling on my part with this my actual, sincere, live sympathy.) May all the good things that the gods always store away for the good and beautiful still be yours!

"Yours devotedly ever,

"JIM KIMBERLEY."

She put the crested, fastidious thing from her, half resentful of the old unsettled score, half fascinated with the pagan sentiments of the note.

Sallie with concentrated attention was tumbling over the pages of her own letter, evidently trying to find the place where explanations began. As Persis asked for none, she finally said, "Well, it's all passing strange! I don't know whether I I can make you understand or not. But the letter you sent to Jim about his hunting lodge was lost—along with a lot of other valuable mail."

"Lost? How, and where, and when, and by whom?"

"To begin with, the Kimberleys are so aristocratic and queer that they never have their mail delivered by a postman. They have a private mail bag, and night and morning a servant goes down to the post-office for it."

Sallie paused, glancing out of the corner of one eye to see what effect her words were having on her listener. No effect being visible, she went on, her drawl breaking into something like swift speech.

"Well, one night this servant, who has been the Kimberley postman for the past twenty-five years, went down to the village for the mail, as usual. A terrible storm had come up—rain, sleet and wind—a hurricane—a tempest on land"—she paused again, and Persis, reminded of the wild night Jerry had returned, started involuntarily. "While the servant was driving home, just as he was crossing the old chain bridge over the Merrimac, the horse got frightened and dashed into a post. The sleigh was upset, the man dragged by his heels, and the mail bag dumped into the Merrimac River!"

Persis lay spell-bound. Encouraged by the dramatic situation and carried away by her own eloquence, Sallie sped on. "The current was swift—the ice broken—the snow and sleet blinding! The servant, badly bruised by his tumble, was clever enough to stop his horse. But when it came to fishing a vanished mail bag out of the speedy Merrimac on a wild winter night, he wasn't it! The next morning the Kimberleys had the ice in the river broken up, and the river dredged. But they never found the mail, nor the checks, nor the valuable communications. And your letter was amongst those lost!"

"It's too fantastic—too grossly plausible!" Persis felt a sudden rage at its plausibility. "I really can't be bamboozled by such a yarn, you know."

Sallie lapsed back into slow speech.. "After all, credulity isn't the point. The point is, are you going through life hating and doing injustice to a man, because you resist a 'yarn'?"

"Beyond doubt that is just what I shall do." The defiance in the tones was not to be mistaken. "Hereafter I do not purpose to swallow such unalloyed lies."

"By that do you mean that I am lying to you about him, or that he lies to me?" Sallie's face was tense and flushed, and she spoke with singular show of feeling. "Because right here I want to tell you that I could never bear it to know that you do not believe me. You mean too much to me—we've been too unusually fine, staunch friends! I don't know of another friendship between women that's as perfect as ours."

"Sallie! I mean—how can you question my meaning? Look at me—no, in the eyes, so—while I say it! Remember always that whatever else fails me—and so much that is dear and vital has—I shall always believe in you. You're the truest, most generous friend a girl ever had. You're all I have left, and next to Jerry, I love you best of anybody in the world."

The proud heart did not often open its doors to the draught of declamation. Knowing this, Sallie realised the import of the

words the more keenly. However, instead of being consoled by them she seemed troubled and uncertain, and pushed the point a peg further by asking, "But Persis—we're none of us any too good—we're frail mortals made of crumbly clay, after all! If I ever should fail you—slip up on my morals, say—could you bear it?"

She leaned forward and put the question sharply, prying under the edge of her friend's unswerving principles with her keen wit.

"Ah, Sallie! Long ago I learned that whatever material the Lord worked up into mortals you're made of finer clay than most of us! You've proved it, so long and in such myriad ways!" Persis smiled lovingly on her. "And now I'll dress and we'll go for a walk. Already I've been such a care to you that you look worn and pale! Soon I shall put you to bed and wait on you."

"'Tisn't care of you that has fagged me! It's my own wickedness."

"Tell me about it, Sallie."

"I can't—now. Some day I'll have to!"

And Persis, thinking she referred to some unhappy circumstance with Jim Kimberley, said, "Look out the window, dear. See how settled the lawns are getting! You'll soon be taking up tennis again!"

So another month passed, and freedom from care became such a factor with Persis that she reacted from it. For days after the climax in Bentley, listless, distrait, she had roamed about the rich, spacious rooms of the Howe homestead, in such wide contrast to her own, missing, seeking, craving the very sets of combinations that had brought her such care and woe. It was weeks before she could lay aside the subconsciousness that there was an extra tray of food to be left in some attractively prominent place, or a bottle of milk to be smuggled on to a window ledge. It was weeks before she could shake off the

habit of listening for belated footfalls on the stairs, after the lights were out and the Howe home stilled for the night. Sometimes in her troubled sleep she would creep out of bed, slip on her kimono, and before she realised the futility, find herself tiptoeing half way down the Howes' broad stairway. It took a surprising amount of control to free herself from the notion that whenever she rested for a length of time, she was shirking some vastly important though forbidden duty, overlooking some one stray, availing chance that would obtain release from some advancing, direful, imminent disaster. Then had come a period of utter relaxation, days of suspended ability to feel or care, total willessness; weeks when she ate prodigiously and slept immoderately, torpid to emotion, memory, the future. And now out of these extremes of high feeling and low tension had come the normal, refreshed desire for action, when ambition began to stir in her mind, and the need of responsibilities and duties to tease her heart. While flickering up through all these returning, kindly sensations, was her unbroken, exquisite susceptibleness to the influences of Spring.

One peerless afternoon in April Sallie went to her friend's room.

"In ten minutes there'll a surprise happen to you—something you love!" 'Twas the old, timeworn formula for any slight variation in the day's entertainment. Persis smiled, wondering how Sallie always managed to envelop commonplacenesses in an air of the unusual, the unknown; wondering if this piquant, half-mysterious something in Sallie's manner was not what made her occasional outspokenness such a relish, just as the speed of her repartee gave zest to her drawling voice and her slothfulness.

"A surprise? How like you!"

"Yes—listen! It's coming a bit ahead of time."

Through the open window came the crunch of gravel, as the ponies picked up the drive with their lively hoofs.

"The saddles again! It reminds me of the ride we had once over the mountain—the day you first told me about Jim Kimberley. Do you realise that was four years ago, Sallie, and that I've never met the man face to face yet?"

"Yes—I do realise! But let's dress now, and be off. Does your habit need brushing? Shall I ring for Nora?"

"Yes, please." But when Sallie was half way across the hall, Persis called her back. "Sallie—do you think I ought —does it look well for me—" and she glanced down at the voluminous black skirt undecidedly.

Sallie, with a modified Lawford stroke, waved the impediment to one side. "What nonsense! Isn't that just a bigger reason why you need exercise and fresh air?"

"But the neighbours, Sallie! Won't they talk?

"Isk! We'll trust to the Howe tradition to squelch the neighbours. Whatever we do they'll think it's lovely. That's what it means to have such an incorruptible, eminently respectable, beloved daddy as mine. One feels so secure in committing an occasional indiscretion!"

"Ah, you admit that it's indiscreet! And I know that it's disrespectful; therefore I oughtn't to go, Sallie."

"Yes, you had! You need the exercise—I want you to go, and go we will! Father's immaculate and conventional behaviour will shield us from all censure. And besides, people in mourning are breaking away from the old barbarous, catacomby precedents and customs! You go and get into your habit!"

In a few minutes Sallie heard a rustle beside her, and glancing up from lacing her high boots, saw Persis standing there. With both hands she clutched a big lump of surplus cloth across the chest and waist of the coat of her riding habit, and held it helplessly.

"Look," she said. "It's hopeless! I can never appear on the road in such a misfit as this! Does it seem possible that

I once filled this out? How gross I must have been when I was happy!"

"Say rather—how graceful, high-bred and aristocratic you are in your present sylph-like proportions. Never mind your coat—it's too hot for a coat, anyway! Wear a taffeta shirt-waist, and with your gauntlets and a smart black ascot you'll look perfectly correct."

Once more over-persuaded, Persis returned to finish her toilet. Why this immense determination, this obstinacy on Sallie's part, to get her into the saddle again? Was it some whim, or was there something ahead premeditated and important? Probably one of Sallie's abstract "somethings"; she was always beguiling with mysteries.

The ponies single-stepped down the avenue, intelligently took the mountain road, and finally branched off on a bridle path that short-cut the distance to the summit and led under sweet buds of overhanging birch and dogwood. Sallie was singularly involved and dry; her silence and the trustiness of Abdallah leading the way gave Persis the chance to absorb the spring fragrances that were more than tonic to her.

They gained the lookout bulging over the bluff-side, like some sky turret on stony castle front. Her eyes roved over the city and bay line, resting on the southern shoulder of the Palisades which linked her heart to the little hill house northward. It was as if from her elevation she held communication with something invisible on the high place of the distant, jutting Palisades, and all between was a-quiver with the gossamer of April afternoon. She gave Abdallah the slack of bridle, which he used in nosing amongst the young grass sprigs, and elbow on saddle horn, leaned her chin in her hand. In such *rapport* with the surrounding beauty was she that she did not notice Sallie's nearness, till Abdallah's mate alongside, sniffing at his bunch of grass, pushed heavily against her stirrup foot. She turned quickly to see what was hurting her, and met the

distress on Sallie's face. Before she could find or ask reasons, Sallie held out one hand piteously and with choky voice, said, "Persis—there isn't any Jim Kimberley!"

Persis straightened up in her saddle, grave and nonplussed. "Pardon, Sallie—I was thinking and didn't quite catch that."

"You will in a minute! I'm just trying to tell you that for four whole years, abysmally, blackly, abominably, I've lied to you. Now you have the truth at last! There isn't—there never has been—any Jim Kimberley!"

Persis stared at her in aboriginal amazement. "No Jim Kimberley?" she echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that for four years I've kept a myth before your eyes till it became lifelike to you—that I've dangled a wretched falsehood between us and our beautiful friendship—that I've perjured my everlasting soul with a useless, silly lie! Don't sit there looking at me like that! Your great eyes turned on me like a searchlight! Can't you believe me when I *do* tell you the truth?"

"Sallie, you're jesting! Don't treat me like this!"

"It's better than to go on lying to you—every step sinking deeper into the quagmire of swampy falsehoods," Sallie amended dispassionately. With her riding crop she flicked off a fly on her pony's front leg; already the storm of her contrition was passing. "It's what's making me look ill—it has worried me so I couldn't sleep nights. I'd lie awake, afraid to shut my eyes! Because every time I did, I'd see little devil-lies frisking jauntily up and down my wall-paper, and if I chanced to drop asleep a minute, great black lying demons would go careering around my bed, ready to pinch me. Oh, 'twas horrible, Persis! And every time you pity me and say I look ill and console me because Jim Kimberley has jilted and neglected me—every time you're tender and kind to me, it is like a thousand needles being stuck into my skin! I got to the point where I couldn't stand it any longer! I had to tell you about it, Persis—and you must

please try to forgive me." She spoke very much as a child might who confesses to having emptied the jam-pot.

"Forgive you! It's hardly a matter of forgiveness—it goes way beyond that! It is bound up intimately with the very fabric of our friendship for the past four years. It strikes the foundation out from under some of our tenderest associations. The point is to reconcile—to make sure—! Do you think the commonplace act of forgiveness encompasses and harmonises all this?"

"You always do make such hard work of everything, Persis!"

The girl thus generalised drew herself up regally, ignored the comment, and with rising sternness asked, "In the first place, do you mind telling me if there are any Kimberleys at all?"

"Indeed there are! Mrs. Kimberley is father's cousin and I go to visit her in Boston. But there is no Jim Kimberley—as talented and fickle and fascinating as I've described—absolutely no one on earth like him."

"Has she any son at all?"

"Yes—but his name is Sammie! And he's very decorous and ladylike, and ten years ago he married a nice Miss Green."

Persis summoned bygones; from out of the past issued events, circumstances, situations, as real to her as anything memory held; the letter from the hunting lodge; the telephone message from New York on Thanksgiving night. Still half-dazed with astonishment, she asked, "Will you kindly tell me who sent me that letter from North Carolina?"

"I did."

Amazed at the audacity and outraged at the trick that had been played with her grief, Persis gasped, "But it was *post-marked* Asheville, North Carolina!"

Sallie chuckled. "That was easy! One of the Hatch girls had to go to Asheville for her lungs. I asked her to mail the letter there—told her it was a joke—and she caught right on."

"She certainly did! Do you realise that 'twas this vicious

note from North Carolina that put me in the preposterously stupid position of corresponding with a myth, that sent me off on a wild goose chase about a fabulous hunting lodge, and finally sidetracked me with a wicked delay that resulted in Jerry's death?"

"Who would ever suppose correct you would ask a strange man to rent his lodge to you, anyway? How could I tell you were going to take such a tack? 'Twas laughable—until you began to curse Jim Kimberley! Then I was very sorry for what I had done."

Persis groaned.

"And the letter of condolence?"

"Oh, the Hatch girl who went South wrote that! She disguised her hand and made it very masculine. She still thinks it part of a joke."

Gradually Persis was working up to the manner and temper of a judge. The instinct to try, to weigh, to sentence, coupled with her outraged feelings, crowded upon her. Everyone of Sallie's confessions added to the mass of her indignation.

"Will you tell me what you think became of my note about the rental of the lodge?"

"That note was the comical part of all the lies! When you told me you had written to Jim I thought I'd pass up! I fancy it went to the dead-letter office—don't you?"

"I don't know! I never allow my fancy to run riot in such a luxury of depravity."

Sallie looked hurt, and a momentary silence fell. Persis turned upon her suddenly. "One thing more—will you kindly explain who telephoned Thanksgiving night? Who belonged to the beguiling, foreign accent?"

"Oh, that was the Hatch girls' brother! He's studying for the stage, you know, and happened to be home for the holiday. I told him the kind of a man he was to impersonate, and he entered into it beautifully! I think he did it very well."

"He certainly did! There isn't a doubt about that left in my mind—neither is there about your own despicable faculty to vulgarly lie."

Sallie winced, and her eyes filled with tears. "Nothing you can ever say to me will add anything to the low opinion of myself I had—until I confessed."

She sighed, as if from the physical relief of having shaken off a great burden. "And right here I want to tell you that if I had known that Jerry had wandered off Thanksgiving day, how lonely and worried you were, I should never have rung you up as I did. When you told me how unhappy you were all day, I was truly sorry."

But Persis, not halting in the by-path of contrition, kept to the straight road of cross-examination. "And so when I almost frightened you back into decency and truth by my sudden impulse to write for the hunting-lodge, you patched up the abominably loose and fantastic lie about my letter being lost in the Merrimac River? You thought to appease my curiosity and suspicion so easily?"

"I *hoped* to: I hardly dared to think you could be so gullible." Such frankness in the face of such deception had small power to assuage wrath.

"You are quite correct in your estimate of my intelligence. I was a drivelling fool—a maudlin, colossal idiot, to ever believe such falsehoods as you spun! Time and again my mind and decency revolted at them! I shall not even attempt to justify my unadulterated boobyism by reminding you that early in life I acquired the lamentably foolish habit of believing those I elected to love and trust."

CHAPTER XXI

THE tender April hour glared with silence. The ponies, nostrils to nostril, nibbled at young grass blades contentedly. The two girls faced each other, the one absolved, silenced by the solace of confession, returning to peace with herself and the world, the other rigid with the sterling qualities of her nature, outraged, incensed with fiery indignation.

"While we're dealing with this dupe—we'll exhaust it! You at least owe me the privilege of understanding at last. Tell me why you ever began to lie to me."

"I think I lied to you because I love you."

Persis gasped. "May I add that your means of expressing 'love' strikes me as a bit peculiar?"

"Perhaps—you have such high, unreachable ideals about all such matters! Nevertheless, I began to lie to you about Jim because I loved you and wanted to entertain you."

"Indeed?" The little word vibrated with sarcasm. "So you actually saw times when I seemed in such need of diversion that you felt justified in resorting to gross lies in order to entertain me."

"Yes, oftentimes! If you'll recall I rarely ever talked about Jim except when you were downhearted and depressed and sad. I did it to divert you from overwork in the Hospital and worry about Jerry, and to give you something new and interesting to think about."

There was really nothing Persis could say to this, so she kept mute, and Sallie proceeded. "Honestly, Persis, you may not realise it, but you are very hard to please and keep interested. You're quite exacting, you know. You expect and demand so much of people you love! No matter how nice they are, you

keep pushing them up on to further pinnacles of perfection till sometimes one's head spins! I fancied at times that you were becoming bored with me—and I wanted to keep your love. I knew I am not clever, not at all brilliantly minded and gifted like the girls you used to admire and quote so much at college. I had the dread that at times my simple commonplaceness and frothy frivolities palled on you. That spring after graduation, when you made me the long visit, the fear came to me that unless I could hit upon some new form of diversion for you, you would sicken of me and throw me over. I couldn't bear that, you know—I can't bear it now."

"You may be interested to know how your powers of entertainment succeeded. Let me say that they succeeded admirably! In my unsophisticated stage, in my total lack of knowledge about all men, except Jerry, the rascally, off-hand, fascinating creature you preached certainly caught my imagination. I made places for him in our plans. I allowed for him in my calculations of the future. How you and he would work out your love affair immensely diverted me. In fact, the whole gross deception about him diverts me yet."

But the time had come when Sallie did not react keenly to rage and offended dignity. She was too relieved, too glad, to either notice sarcasm, or resent it. She went on reminiscently. "The strangest thing about the lie is how it grew! I began to tell you about Jim that morning on the porch, because I knew you were sad about Jerry's change from the law to preaching. When I saw it actually did divert you, and when you kept asking me to tell you more, I made up something else to please you. And before I realised it, the myth grew and grew, till I half believed it myself. When you began to take it so seriously, the situation got beyond me. It swept me along on a swift current of lies, and at last I was just the creature of the thing I had created."

"I suppose you refer now to the time you announced your

engagement to Jim Kimberley, and begged me to be your matron of honour and Jerry to marry you? I can see my white trailing gown and the bunch of violets yet!" The voice still rang with ill-suppressed rage and contempt.

"Yes. You see my imagination is so vivid that I really lived part of my lies! They clutched me, mind and heart. They were like some machine of evil that had me bound to its wheels."

"Your racking pains at being thus bound never retarded your ability to act your falsehoods well. I remember your nervous agitation the day we went to the opera—you actually wrenched off a shoe button in your reminiscent excitement at the thought of past bliss. If I recall correctly, in my solicitude of your heart anguish I offered to stay home from 'Lohengrin'—because Jim Kimberley had neglected you!"

"Yes, your solicitude that day almost forced my hand. I came near confessing to you then and there, on the spot. In fact, several times your kindness threw my vileness into such bold relief that I longed to be rid of my lie. You'll recall that when I was so sick I tried to tell you something in my delirium. 'Twas the lie that was making me ill, and I knew it! But every time I started to talk you'd pinch me or hush me up. I suppose you thought I was giving away some sacred secret about Jim Kimberley! But all the time I was trying to shake that cursed lie off my soul."

Persis recalled her own hyper-delicate efforts to guard Sallie's supposed secret, and groaned again.

"Don't think I haven't suffered too! Oh, you've given me some bad half hours, Persis! Two or three times you've almost caught me in lies, and that was far worse than having to confess them! You'd have spells of diabolical shrewdness and logic, and force lie upon lie out of me. Horned dace!—how frightened I've been at times! You'd turn on me with your great, gray, truthful eyes and question and cross-question me

till I had to lie to save myself from your fury! When you were in the training school and got so reproachful and offish and haughty because I didn't bring Jim to call on you I had to lie to get him West and South and Europeanised. And that time you threatened to write to him and tell him what you thought about him and how sick I was, you forced me to lie about his Martinique trip. So you see I never could drum up enough courage to face your superiority and incorruptibleness. Your very passion for perfection, the very invincibility of your ideas about righteousness were what made me fear and lie so. Oh! It's so blissful to be free from the despicable, degrading thing at last! And I suppose it all came of my old habit and love of exaggerating!" Sallie filled her lungs with the pure, sweet April air and smiled relievedly at the landscape.

Still upright in her saddle, Persis was more astounded by these last announcements. So Sallie was shifting her sin off on to somebody else, on the ground that the somebody else's standards of truth and decency were so lofty as to be fearsome! This brought a touch of the ridiculous to the situation. But before she had decided just how to classify or use this new element, Sallie proceeded farther. "There is another reason why I lied to you—at least, why I wove the lie into my personal affections. It was subordinate to my desire to divert you, but it was real. Perhaps you'll care to hear it, since we're thrashing it all out so thoroughly. I was jealous of your and Jerry's love, and I hated to have you know that I never had an opportunity to marry. No one realises how sensitive I am about this last point!"

"It is simply impossible for me to understand such attitudes. I shall waive, too, the question of whether you are in the habit of lying to your other friends. As interesting and illuminating as such knowledge might be, it does not concern me. But just for psychology, I should like to ask how your religion felt in the face of four years of multiple falsehood?"

Sallie started and winced. She was a communicant of one of the large churches in her city.

"My poor religion!" she said. "Often it struggled and pleaded with me. But you must not fail to differentiate between my God and yours. My God understands, forgives, and consoles. Yours, cross between paganism and Puritanicalism that it is, persecutes, censures, and avenges."

Persis in her thoughts was forced to accept that in Sallie there abided part, if not the whole, of truth.

"But the reproach of my religion was not the hardest part to bear. Aside from the dread of losing your love and the fear of facing your wrath, I had to—oh, I shudder every time I think of it! 'Twas awful! What if he had died believing in me—me, a black liar?"

"You refer to your father, I suppose?"

"Yes. After I really began to see and fear my sin, every time I looked at father was like a stab. I saw him in all his fineness —his absolute, unwavering principles of truth and honour, sustained by them through eighty years of this hard, wicked, trying old world, and the thought of how he believed in me and loved me, and how he'd feel if he ever knew he had raised such a disgraceful daughter became a perfect anguish to me."

Sallie readjusted herself in the saddle, and spread out the wrinkles in her riding skirt. Then she threw back her head blithely. "But now I feel so happy again! So lighthearted! The blessed joy of repentance and confession! It's all well with my soul now. I feel at peace with you, with father, and myself. For surely, you'll forgive Sallie, dear?" She leaned forward and smiled into the grave face.

"Forgiving is infantile compared with forgetting! Whether I can even adjust myself to these new and extraordinary conditions, at this moment I can't say. You see I am not simplified like you: I am complex and proud, and just now I'm inexpressibly hurt. I'm also quite angry with you. If my heart,

from long habit of affection and trust, should find it possible to overlook, my mind would still resent baseness, and revolt from you."

"What have I done that you should be so cruel to me?" Tears splashed over the pony's black neck and sobs shook Sallie's little body. This eliminated her note of flippancy and bespoke genuine contrition. It made Persis reconsider. Then she saw, indeed, that they argued from very different viewpoints, that all along they had carried widely varying standards of truthfulness. It did not occur to her, in her rage, that if Sallie's conception of sin was too lax, her own conception of retribution was too harsh. She saw only how impossible it was for her to compromise with a lying past, to accept her friend's light valuation of truth. Of their old friendship she saw nothing but the ruins, so almost entirely was its foundation of falsehood. She reflected that for ages sceptics had prophesied that sooner or later friendship between women were bound to spring asunder, usually on the rocks of jealousy over some man. Well, in their case, instead of the traditional jealousy, the cause of wreckage had been a lie. Again the fact boldly faced her that of their long, perfect friendship nothing remained but the semblance—nothing but bare, outer walls: the furnishings, the ornaments, the treasures, Sallie with her own hands had pitched out into the gutter. Until they could break ground for another structure in some new, wholesome region, until they could form some new decent attachment, friendship between them must be suspended. Then she wondered if the structure of their old relationship had been strong enough to stand the strain of remodelling and renovation?

"You've no idea how I depend on you," Sallie sobbed. "I need the moral support of your belief. If you refuse to believe in me, no telling what may become of me! I may go right on until I turn into nothing but a black, inveterate, perpetual liar! Of course I believe in telling little social lies,

lies that keep people from hurt feelings and that make them happy, and that rub off the unpleasant corners of brutal truths. But I hope to die and cross my heart (Sallie performed this last function) I've never lied to you materially except about Jim. Persis, you're generous and high-minded. When you get used to the idea that there isn't any Jim Kimberley, you'll be able to take me back into your mind, as well as your heart. We'll go on together a lifetime—if only you'll unbend and help! I need a life time to make good in—to serve you—to show you that the truth does dwell in me—that you can safely believe in me."

"Do you honestly, actually expect that I can ever believe in you again?"

Fresh sobs broke out. "You must, Persis! I can't give you up like this—you mean too much to me. You're three-ply to me— friend, mother, and child. That's the way I love you—always have. If you refuse to believe me—where will I stand —what will I have left?"

The wail was heartfelt. It almost pierced Persis's rectitude. She gathered up the bridle and drew on her gauntlet. "Shall we return now?" she said.

That evening dinner at the Howe homestead went very moodily. Sallie's pathetic attempts at lightheartedness and easy assurance, her father's kindly and chivalrous attentions to both girls, fell on the rock of Persis's reserve and hurt like pretty wavelets lapping against the edge of a reef. After dinner she excused herself on the ground of weariness, and went to her room. Going at once to her closet, she took from the hooks the line of black garments, thin, clinging, pitiful things, and laying them on the bed, began to fold them in trunk lengths. It did not take her long to fold her gowns—she needed so few since there was no Jerry to care what she wore. The closet emptied, she went to the bureau, and began to collect the smaller articles of her toilet and apparel, piling them on the bed.

When Nora came upstairs to turn down the bedclothes invitingly and leave a tankard of icewater in the hall, Persis requested her to tell Miss Sallie that if the coachman was still on the place she would like to have her trunk brought from the attic. Startled by such an unexpected turn in one whom she had been taught to regard as a member of the family, Nora delivered the message with such despatch that almost simultaneously Sallie rapped on the guest room door.

"Come in!" Without looking up, Persis continued her packing with all the agility born of her several thorough moves during the past year.

"Persis—dear heart! What does this mean, child? Surely you're not packing—to go?"

"It means that I can't accept your hospitality while I feel toward you the way I do. It means that I've reached the point where I must find peace somewhere. I thought perhaps Tinkham would give it to me."

She sat down on the rug before the bureau, upsetting the contents of another drawer in her lap, sorting and folding briskly the dainty bits of undergarments, hand-made and finely patterned, the relics of her trousseau fashioned barely a year ago. "Up on the lookout this afternoon I caught a glimpse of the course our friendship must take to ever prosper again. In the confused rush of sensations and adjustment since, I've lost sight of it. I'm hoping that somewhere in the high places of the New England hills I shall be able to get a still surer, larger vision of what remains for me to do with the scraps of life left to me." The low, sure voice faltered slightly; but the thin hands ran deftly through the pile of garments.

"But Persis—not suddenly, like this—so unceremoniously! What will the neighbours think?"

"Whatever you do they will think it right. You have only to rely on the Howe tradition of correctness." The sting was lost on Sallie, who went on with her protests.

"Already I've told everybody that you were going to spend the summer with me on the Jersey coast. What shall I tell them when you precipitate yourself to Tinkham?"

"It ought not to be difficult for you to know what to say on any sudden or dramatic occasion."

"That's unkind, Persis. It is not Christianlike to hurt anybody wilfully."

"Our ideas of Christianity seem to differ somewhat. May I ask you to have Robert bring down my trunk?"

"What will father say? What will the Hanchetts say?"

"Your father need only understand that I have been obliged to bring my visit to a close sooner than I expected. The Hanchetts will say that they're glad to see me! You forget that they, too, in their way, are fond of me. For weeks they've been writing for me to come home—to come to Tinkham," she corrected bravely.

Sallie looked around the room for a support. "Do you mind if I shift these skirts from this rocker to the bed?" she asked. Having made this change she dropped into the rocker and sat gazing at the industrious, bent figure before her. She wanted to tell Persis how like she was to the proverbial little girl who took her rag dolls and went home. But her wit told her that like everything else in the world there was a proper time to be waggish, and that this was decidedly not the time. So she refrained from her bit of facetiousness and rocked nervously. After watching the headlong packing a few moments longer she said, "I plainly see that it's like trying to dam the Gulf Stream to hold you! Therefore it's for me to help you off in every way I can. Won't you let me fold these waists?"

"Thank you, no." Thus repulsed in her generosity, Sallie fell back into her original attitude in the quarrel. "Really, Persis, you'll pardon me if I say that I think you're making altogether too much trouble for yourself over our unfortunate episode. I can understand that you feel hurt. But to push

our quarrel so far that it will embarrass us both to find explanations that match our breakage seems to me childish and unnecessary. I don't understand your attitude."

"No, I see now that you can't—that you never have. All along we've had very different valuations and measurements of life."

"Are you really going to throw me over completely?"

"I don't think it is possible for me to break so entirely and abruptly the ties of such a long converse. My affections root in deeper ground. But the time has come when I feel utterly stranded. One after another, things have failed me till I'm dizzy watching the wreckage. For months, befogged and deluded, I groped around trying to find my way through Jerry's strangenesses. Now I'm groping to find where I stand with my best friend. Then I felt blinded. Now I feel smothered. And as fast as ever I can I'm going to Tinkham for a breathing space! All I ask is for the means and strength to get there."

Sallie gave a perplexed sigh: such ramifications of feeling and need were so incomprehensible to her easy-going nature. Presently the long habit of care reasserted itself, and she asked, "Do you need any money for the trip?"

"No thank you!"

"Well, at least, I hope you will be discreet enough to keep up the bluff of friendship. It will save so much awkward explanation, if you only do! Write to me—let me send you surprises once in a while, just as I have for the past nine years. And I shall hope that some time you'll come to visit us again. Father enjoys you so much!"

"I can't promise about future visits, but I quite agree with you about the bluff. It would be too vulgar, too tenemental to break all at once. We'll keep up the old face of things and drift out of it gradually, without giving our friends the shock of wonder. Perhaps some day, if we ever were real friends in the past, we'll land in some decent, new relationship."

"Never the old—Persis?"

But Persis's only answer was a glance of scorn.

"Very well! If you'll excuse me I'll see that your request is fulfilled." She went out, closing the door. A few minutes later Robert appeared with a steamer trunk balanced on his shoulders.

While Persis was setting the last trunk-tray in place, Sallie rapped on her door again.

"I've ordered early breakfast for you, and Robert will take you down to the 8:23 train. Do you think of anything else I can do?"

"Thank you. First thing in the morning you may telegraph the Hanchetts that I'll be there about five o'clock."

Sallie sat down on the edge of the bed and leaned her folded arms along the brass foot rail dejectedly. "Persis, how will you ever endure the isolation and monotony of Tinkham? Think of it—everywhere you look, every bend of the river, every twig of the maple trees reminding you of Jerry and your childhood together! Don't go, child—don't torture yourself unnecessarily. You need care, and I need someone to care for. Stay with me, dear!"

If she had any hope that at the last minute the proud heart would relent, she soon saw its futility.

"You're quite mistaken, Sallie! Where once Tinkham seemed to me the hotbed of stagnation, it now seems the garden of tranquillity. All maudlin sentiments I shall put aside, glad that the place does speak of Jerry. Too long I've leaned on you and your sympathy! Now I'm going to turn my back on self-pity and stand alone."

"Well, if you will persist in going, I shall go in to the Grand Central with you! I couldn't feel happy unless I knew you got off safely and had plenty of magazines to read."

"It won't be at all necessary for you to do that, thank you."

"Ah, but so soon you forget our compact about the bluff! And besides, I want to go—always I shall want to do all I can

for you, to show you I'm truly sorry and can still be trusted. Shall I turn out your gas and open the window a bit?"

"No, thank you."

"At least you'll let me kiss you good-night!" And without giving Persis time to protest or refuse, Sallie threw her arms around her and kissed her many times. But she met no response from the limp arms and set lips, and choking down her sobs, passed to her own room.

Left to herself, Persis undressed rapidly, and slipping on her kimono, curled up amongst the couch cushions to think. But the April nights were still chill and bodily discomfort impeded deep-thought mining. Moreover, a great burden of depression and world-weariness, a new sense of the futility of believing in anything, sat upon her spirit. When in Bentley she had felt herself in the clutch of loneliness: now she felt intensely desolated, utterly abandoned. She started up, to flee from such a fate, and with light, nervous footfalls took two or three turns around the room—the dear, comfortable old room that for so many years she had come to regard as her own. Then her roving eyes chanced on the fireplace, and instinctively she paused in front of it, as if to warm her heart before the invisible blaze of memory. But instead of warmth, through her thin night clothes she felt the chill draught drawing up the flue, and, catching up a box of matches, stooped to touch a light to the pile of kindling. She backed away from the responsive blaze, and stood with her tall, slender beauty now outlined, now shadowed, by the light which shone through her long night garments. When the energy of the first burst of flame had subsided she crouched down on the hearth, and because this time she had no visible, actual offering to bring, she sacrificed some of her childish conceptions and uncompromising ideals of life. But before she was able to do this, she passed through another episode of searching and reasoning, one of those strange, detached events of thought that, coming out of our

deep consciousness, leave such strong impressions, suggest so much, and alter our theories of human affairs, changing the whole colour and pattern of life that we weave out of our richest experiences.

Reaching back to the source of her conscious being, she asked why every object she had set her heart upon had failed her? One by one she reviewed the blows that had been dealt her cherished hopes. First from out of the mass issued the lonely years of childhood, unsheltered, uninterpreted by mother's love. Then came the years of religious turmoil, when, sceptic mind warring on yearning soul, with fragile but devout touch she had patched together elementary simplicities into a creed of her own. Into this tranquillity which she had conjured up for herself Jerry had plunged, with his cyclonic shifts and shunts and passion, sweeping her along with him on the crest of their great love of each other. Then a little space of mingled rapture and anguish, and presto! Jerry gone—and with him all her cherishings of motherhood. And last of all Sallie had risen up to smite her with a useless lie. It was not that in her review of the past she regarded Sallie's stroke as so much more prodigious than the others. Rather, it had come as a climax, rounding out, perfecting her cycle of disappointments. Moreover, it had come when her powers of resistance were somewhat weakened by her brave attempts to bear the other blows heroically. Sallie's stroke, while puny compared with others she had stood up against, was like the last straw on the back of the proverbially overladen camel.

She asked searchingly of the silence whether she had deserved so much of chastisement. And what was the lesson to be learned from it all? Continuous failures and dumb experiences blight after a while, unless we are able to draw from them some warning or criterion of the future. What did this future hold for her? Backward twenty-six years she glanced, and even in her depression, through the mass of balked hopes

and baffled aims she saw frequent inter-layers of sudden joys and unmixed happiness. But when she peered into the future, it had the appearance of a blind alley.

In her ardent earnestness to concentrate and beautify life, and in pitiful igorance of the risks she took, she had early started out with the theory that she needed two tried and affined friends only, a girl friend and a man friend. This arrangement seemed to her to provide for all possible contingencies and vicissitudes of life. There were so many times when nothing but the superior strength, the wide advantage of masculine viewpoint, could take the brunt of life; on the other hand, hours would come when one might need the all-tenderness, the light touch of womanhood. She had supposed that she was realising this ideal of friendship in her choice of Jerry and Sallie. To these two relationships she had expected to contribute all that her heart held of trust and love: in them she had hoped to find the adventure of sex, abiding comradeship, every sympathy needed, and the inspiration to want and find the best that life offers. But as she compared what she had reckoned with what had actually happened to her, she was startled into asking herself if some fault of her own had been responsible for any of the disparity between her expectations and the realities that so beset her? Had she expected too much of young lives and old loves?

The idea electrified her. She started up, and standing obliquely to the fireplace, leaned one elbow against the edge of the mantel, statuesque. With her other hand gathering her light draperies around her, she held them back from the draughty blaze, and peered into the fire. She resolved that she must take life less broken-heartedly—take it indeed as she found it, not as she so passionately desired it to be; that she must adapt herself to circumstances and people, instead of resisting everything that chanced to fall short of her particular idea of perfection.

Always from her earliest consciousness she had craved understanding, companionship, and infinite love—some one to lean on and help her bear the impact of life. Now she saw that one of the very essentials of life is its isolation: that all real and soul-toning experience is individual. Where once she expected aid in the task of life, she now saw that little avails to help and comfort us in our lonely passage except the far cheers of the throngs who have gone triumphantly before. The realisation illuminated many dark spots for her, modified many seeming imperfections in those she loved. And seeing at last, she marvelled how she could have bungled so many of her calculations in the past.

A great craving for Peace came over her; always before she had desired Success and Love. In especially reverential moments she had also asked for Faith. She wondered if this new yearning for peace meant that her youth had been stripped from her; she had always associated a love of quiet with old age. But not caring to dwell too long on meanings, because of the series of hurts which her heart had already sustained, she saw in the hill-locked quiet of Tinkham, the promise of the very peace she craved.

CHAPTER XXII

TO PERSIS watching the adolescent year in Tinkham came the delightful sense that she was getting the benefit of two springs. Already she had enjoyed the elusive mildness of the season in Jersey, and coming north-eastward a hundred and fifty miles, discovered that New England was about three weeks behind Jersey in the race of months. She awoke one bright May morning and glanced around her green room. It was in the apex of a second-floor gabled extension, and the head of her bed stood between the angles of the roof, so that the slanting green walls drooped down on either side of her like the enfolding wings of an unfledged angel. It was possible for Persis to see in her room visions of angelic benignity with taxed imagination and closed eyes only. Whenever she opened them all sentiment and poetry were chased away ruthlessly, by the green horrors that everywhere besieged her view. The bed was painted a light pea shade, and the low foot board, while behaving decorously at either end, in its very middle leaped up exuberantly in a large green moon, displaying every morning to her awakening and beauty-loving eyes a basket of prim choked flowers, painted in violent colours. A twin basket, properly enlarged, sat in the apex of the head of her bed, but this, fortunately, she was not obliged to look at till her sensitive nerves were somewhat steadied by a good breakfast.

Years ago the slant low walls had been "done" in white paper adorned with painfully precise green roses. These roses even carried their abnormality a step further in that they clambered *down* the wall, and so gave the silly effect of standing on their heads. She could never overlook the fact that this idiosyncrasy of the poor flowers was the fault of the paperhanger.

She could have sympathised and tolerated them if they had been red roses, thus proclaiming that they suffered from a rush of blood to the head; but that they, defying all circulatory law, should still maintain their absurd colour, outraged both her artistic sense and her knowledge of arterial circulation. They at last took on for her the anomalies of heart disease, and tormented her fancy unreasonably. The floor was painted white and Nancy Drake saw to it that this white was kept spotless. There were times when Persis, alone in the wake of Nancy's retreating brooms and dust rags, had to place shoes and things in untidy attitudes about the floor, just to relieve the strain of this nerve-racking neatness. In front of her bed lay a huge, hand-made rug, braided of waste bits of green materials, and sewed together circularly. Each morning as she stepped out of bed upon it she had to dispossess herself of the notion that she was putting her bare foot on a ridiculously long grass snake lying there beside her in a dizzy coil. In the gable end of the room was a window, which, being small, was devoid of a curtain. However, a white holland shade halved the outlook across the orchard, while only partially concealing the interior of the room from curious gaze outside. This particularly worried Persis when she wished to retire, the shade being destitute of rollers, and its position being permanently secured by a median line of tape tied in a hard knot; but as she nearly always went to bed by candle light, and as the inhabitants of Tinkham, although normally curious, were not without their own ethics of neighbourliness, she was able to maintian a sense of privacy sufficiently pleasurable.

In front of the window stood a low white rocking chair, and above it hung a steel engraving of Grace Darling with wild eyes and disheveled tresses, rowing heroically over bounding billows. Diagonally across the farther end of the room—or where the slant of the roof, the end of the ell, and the floor intersected each other—and jammed well back in a position that required

of the user expert ducking of the head in order to avoid banging it against the inclined wall, stood a washstand painfully identical with the bed in its embellishments, and furnished with a quaint set of green china in the pattern of willow ware.

The masterpiece of the room was its "dressing table." It was fashioned from a small sized barrel with a square pine board atop. Over this top and draped around its edge was a voluminous valance of white muslin, which totally concealed the plebeian footing of the device. The geometrical series of brass-headed tacks which held this skirt in place was also intended to augment its general effect of ornamentation. From a bird-cage hook screwed in the wall above and cruelly piercing the callow heart of a precipitate rose, hung a bridal veil effect of white muslin, freshly starched and with befrilled edge, in the deep recess of which was a small old-fashioned mirror in a gilt frame.

The design of the dressing table had been culled from a lady's-home-decoration magazine, the yearly subscription of which, during a particularly long and invalided winter, Mrs. Hanchett had been treated to by her indulgent husband: its materialisation was the product of Mrs. Hanchett's choicest thoughts and delicate hands. Aside from being considered a work of high ingenuity, enviable artistic prowess, and low expense throughout all Tinkham, the table also stood for an innovation, a renaissance of bedroom adornment. It became the model of sundry other dressing tables, over which the thrifty housewives, albeit, perhaps, limited in material and means, vied with each other in producing modified and luxuriant results. As one body of inconoclasts they relegated from "spare room" to garret their heavy high-boys and hand-carved bureaus of cherry and curly maple, tinged richly to molasses-candy tints by generations of wear and shifts of housecleaning periods. Mrs. Hanchett's daring really heralded the craze for barrel furniture that at one time spread throughout rural districts

of New England. With impetuous haste the housewives of these regions set to work with saw and hammer and nails, and from the staves of derelict barrels evolved themselves a new genus of settees, sewing tables, hammocks, and plant stands. Aside from their predilection for economy, their labours embodied the innate desire of all of us to use the material at hand in the building up and beautifying of our daily lives. They also expressed the inherent craving of all mankind for something fresh and new. In the depressing gloom that the long hard New England winters had upon their spirits, in the devastating routine of their housework and the orbital monotony of plain, solid surroundings, this new idea of the dressing table, all the constituents of which lay within their reach, came to them with all the charm of novelty. In the smouldering fire of their imaginations, their zeal sought for creations something like Louis XV. effects. Their efforts marked the need and the desire of a return to gladder, lighter, prettier things.

However, when Persis wished to look in a mirror, her admiration of Mrs. Hanchett's ingenuity did not palliate the inconvenience of having to play hide-and-seek with her own image through the ruffles down the bridal veil. Her alternative was to bolt her head through this starchy barricade, with the certain result of displacing the angle of its immaculate hang. Moreover this last disarrangement always disturbed Nancy Drake's conception of neatness and made her mumble trite axioms of orderliness. Therefore Persis rarely indulged in a look into her mirror, not suffering any special privation thereby, since she cared very little to behold herself in these days.

The room had once been the sanctum of the Hanchetts' only child, a frail wind-flower that the blasts of New England winters had swept away in her fourteenth season. When Persis's own spacious and formal home had been broken up by the death of her parents, and Mr. and Mrs. Hanchett had led her, their ward, to this sanctum of their hearts, silently, she

knew that she had been paid the highest compliment they had to offer. Their act had vouched for the depth of their regard for her father: their silence proved to her how genuine was their sense of guardianship. True to her racial reticence on all matters of sentiment and emotion, Mrs. Hanchett had never requested that Persis leave the outlines of the room intact, a chaste monument to the cheerless taste of its last occupant. Neither had she ever suggested that Persis change the room about and place her own belongings in convenient and homelike order; she therefore lodged in the gable nook merely. This abstinence of aggression and personality had been her way of matching the fineness of the Hanchetts' attitude toward her. Hitherto her occupancy had been casual—short intervals of break in college routine during her senior year, odd weeks like her vacation while in training, and the chinks between her prolonged visits with Sallie. Most of these intervals had fallen in the summertime, when the verdure of the room had passed for coolness and quaint repose. But now, she pondered, as she lay in bed this bright May morning,—the room became the only home she had, her sanctuary; the place where she was to give her thoughts nourishment, her spirits warmth, her soul exercise. How could she ever expect to expand and fertilize personality in such chaste verdure! How could she ever pass a New England winter in it! As well try to warm one's body and heart on the side of an ice-floe! Two or three necessities of her toilet articles lay on the dressing table, and even behind its frilled hood, glared luxuriously in contrast with the childish primness all about. On the foot of the bed her kimono of violet silk, across the chair by the window her long black gown, each bespeaking intimate knowledge of beauty and world experience, seemed to violate the room's virginity. One couldn't go on so forever, stifled by chastity incarnate, plunging into trunk depths every time one wanted a fresh handkerchief or a nail file, or craved a glimpse of a cherished, dearly pictured face!

She started from her revery, surprised to find that her watch said half past eight. No vision of a Nora tripping in with a dainty breakfast tray this morning! When she overslept now she boiled her own egg—in the contempt of Nancy Drake. And if this scornful personage, who year in and year out never arose later than five o'clock, and who, therefore, had small toleration of those appearing at nine, happened to be dropping slits and twisted ends of untanned doughnuts into a kettle of sizzling fat, in order to get what butter she wanted for her breakfast she had to pick her own way down the steep, damp cellar stairs, flanked on either side with earthenware jars and be-saucered plates of food, to the stone crock sitting below on the cool cellar bottom. The advent of ice boxes in Tinkham awaited the daring imagination that had inaugurated barrel furniture. This morning, however, Nancy Drake had carefully preserved on the back of her cook stove (she always laid vehement and personal claim to all articles of kitchen equipment) a plate of creamed dried beef for Persis. On one corner of her white oilclothed kitchen table (where Persis was expected to breakfast in order to avoid "mussing up" the dining room at such an unseemly hour) she had left a generous piece of dried apple pie, well barricaded by an inverted quart bowl from the invasion of invisible and impossible flies. In Tinkham Nancy Drake held the record for an absolutely fly-proof kitchen. No winged insect ever long survived the onslaught and swish of her calico apron and sinewy arms. For especially prolific seasons she always manufactured and kept ready for use a fly-chaser of slitted newspapers tied to a half-length of broomstick. But so untiring and early and nimble was her extermination of winged creatures, that she was rarely forced to resort to this device. She kept it, rather, draped over a framed wood-cut of Andrew Jackson in her kitchen, for the moral suasion it had on flies in general.

Moreover, throughout the village and country side this

middle-aged spinster was known simply and plainly by the name of Nancy Drake. No one ever quite dared to call her Nancy: she was hardly the one to brook familiarity. On the other hand, Miss Drake was objectionably formal in a region where all the inhabitants had grown up together since infancy. Time was when the Drakes had been a family of importance in the village; her grandfather was the carpenter who built the church in Tinkham. Even now the deed of one of the neatest farms that snuggled down on the hillside and reached out into the Connecticut Valley, lay in Nancy Drake's name. If, when her parents died and her only brother moved to that vague region known in Tinkham as "out West," Nancy Drake chose to "let" the home place to some enterprising farmer, and to preside over the house of an invalided lady, there was no carping caste in Tinkham that thought any the worse of her. Rather was her independence thought to be thoroughness and business sagacity.

During her breakfast Persis several times attempted to visit with Nancy Drake, in order to show indirectly her appreciation of her meal. (New Englanders of the pure blood rarely approach subjects of conversation by direct methods.) But this worthy woman was turning over in her mind her plans for enlarging her recipes for this year's pickling and canning. Since there was an extra member in the family to cook for she had to make new estimates of how many green tomatoes and red onions and spice bags she needed for her piccalilli and pepper hash and chili sauce. There would be needed, too, extra jars of strawberry preserves, and more spiced blackberry jam. Persis, therefore, received small encouragement to talk and less response. Mrs. Hanchett was still closeted, it being her habit to rest in bed mornings and arise shortly before the mid-day dinner. This habit of hers was considered throughout Tinkham the result of her having an over-indulgent husband, and was tolerated only on the ground of her invalidism and superior

literary tastes. Thus forced upon herself, Persis yielded to the lure of sunshine splashing in through the open door. Reflecting that probably sunshine was the only thing that was ever allowed to splash on the creamy whiteness of Nancy Drake's broad floor boards, except the water under a handful of sand and rushes, she passed out into the back yard.

There stood the old bench under the cherry tree, with the corpulent robins waddling about in the young grass alongside. Since her return to Tinkham she had avoided lingering in the orchard, vaguely impelled, perhaps, by Sallie's prediction that every twig and nook would clamour of childhood and Jerry: but as the anniversary of her wedding neared and the spring calls, maturing, lured her more artfully, a great solace of old things returned to her. So now the sight of the garden bench brought her a strange peace. She approached it reverently, as one does the shrines of memory, with slow step and bowed head. And the while the old jangle of shifting scenes, incongruous situations, and conflicting emotions seemed to be slipping beyond her hearing. She paused to listen, startled by the surcease of familiar sound. She heard the echoes of the chaos that had driven all sense of continuity out of her life, resounding faintly on the receding beach of her woes. The beach line was still angular, but the angle was less acute. She was still conscious that the beat of the surf had changed the contour and impress of her spirit, but she was equally conscious that the noise and roar that had accompanied the storm were dying away, as breakers subside into the wash, wash of an ebbing tide.

Affected strangely by her new feelings, she sank down on the old bench, stretching out her arms on either side along the top of its moss-patched back. She could not help noticing that her knees no longer threatened to pierce the folds of her skirt, and that the sense of freedom from ache was grateful. She wondered what metamorphosis had come over her now, and

decided that 'twas one of restored balance. Her long tramps over the hills, farm foods, and the high, thin air of Tinkham had restored her physical equilibrium, and these in turn had given a healthy reaction to her mind. She sat so, relaxed and still, her thoughts rippling on in quiet channels of indifferent ideations—now mingling them with the pleasant clatter of tin things in the kitchen as Nancy Drake "washed up" the litter from her baking, now blending them into the reds of the robin's breast as he plumped on the ground in front of her, now letting herself drift along in the gentle current of the Connecticut as it gracefully took the southerly hills.

Then she became conscious of another strangeness happening within her. It happens to all of us at some stage of our finer development; but to Persis the experience was new, and by its novelty held her to its consummation. She felt her three-ply nature disintegrate with no shock of dissolution, and as a spectator, saw her body, mind, and spirit pose as individuals for her close inspection. Her body, so recently freed from the strain of endurance, fell into easy, happy abeyance to its mates —no stress of emotion, no impact of shock or hardship! Just the suspension of non-existence and the joy of no sensation at all after the excruciation of sense!

And withal, as she sat there under the old cherry-tree, memory made her conscious of the past and successive thrall of all three of her elements: the moments when her young, crude love of Jerry, rapture of the senses, had overmastered her, finally subsiding in her collapsed hopes of motherhood; the moments of her chastisement, her baptism of grief and renunciation, when emotion had ingulfed all her other tendencies and gifts, finally abating in her great craving for peace; and lastly, swinging in between nobly, striving ever to reconcile, to alchemise the things of the body and the spirit, the goodly stretches of mentality, when her intelligence struggled for domination, finally culminating in the large associations and growth of

college life. Nevertheless, as she glanced back over the four years of the academic trusteeship that had taken in hand the advancement of her mind, nothing in all the glamour of college experience glowed to match the brightness and vigour of the mind-creature that flitted back and forth between her dismemberment there in the old garden. Never before had she felt so entirely in the sway of intellect triumphant over emotion. Then she saw indeed that, although the difference in the quality of her two mind-phases was partially one of immaturity and ripeness, the one had been trained according to academic methods and myths, the other according to the rules of life's realities. And she realised at last how precious these latter processes were, in that they had brought her to full mental stature. This, then, was what the strange disintegration of self she had been watching meant; it meant that her mind had set itself free from the bondage of her heart—free to direct her life once more, to take up old habits of divertisement and health and work. She wondered where this vigorous, impelling mind was going to take her, how long this exhilaration and delicious sway of the intellect was going to last, and who could ever make her feel again? A shadow moved across her vision, and glancing toward the house, through the kitchen door she saw Mrs. Hanchett coming.

She had plenty of time to gauge herself to this lady's calibre, so slowly she came across the lawn. A gown of some soft gray stuff accentuated her sickliness, and from her shoulders hung a soft knitted shawl that added a droop to her figure and a burden to her steps. The one thing that relieved her colourlessness was a little red book that she carried in one hand. Mrs. Hanchett had a predilection for little red books. In fact, she collected them. In one corner of her bedroom stood a "what-not," the black walnut skeleton of which was well padded with small tomes of scarlet binding. What the content, or who the author of these diminutive volumes, was of

indifferent significance, compared with their outward complexion and size. The tourist event of Mrs. Hanchett's year was an autumnal trip to Springfield, where, sustained by the legal arm of her indulgent husband and flushed by her bibliomania, she traversed vistas of book counters and department stores in loving quest of her hobby. It was the occurrence of these trips to Springfield and the replenishment they brought to the what-not that gained for Mrs. Hanchett the local reputation of literary prowess that excused her not getting up till dinner time.

"Good morning, Persis," she said, "I'm glad to see you enjoying the orchard once more."

Persis returned her greeting and moved along to give another sitting on the bench. Mrs. Hanchett took as deep a breath of the sun-drenched air as her narrow chest permitted, and clasping her little red book a trifle more closely, laid one blue-veined hand on the warm young one beside her. Then she spoke.

"For some time I've been wanting to let you know how glad Mr. Hanchett and I are to have you with us again." Her breath quickened, as from the great effort of opened lips. Then she went on bravely, hurriedly, "Mr. Hanchett and I want you to understand how—how deeply we feel for you." She paused at length now, and her hand closed over the girl's fingers tensely. "My husband and I want you always to feel at home here with us, just as long as the quiet village and the quiet house appeal to you." She smiled again and hurried on, as if fearful of losing grip on her message before she could deliver it. "It's a great comfort to Mr. Hanchett to know that you are enjoying the little green room upstairs. And we both enjoy your youth. It somehow helps us to fill the place left empty by the one we lost. And I can't begin to tell you how I appreciate all the little skilful touches of care you've given me. I hope you don't mind my telling you all this," she added mildly, apologetically. Then she sighed from great relief: for six weeks she had tried to open

her heart to the lonely girl, and as often her reticence had closed down upon it, forbiddingly.

Persis took the wrinkled hand in her own. "Thank you," she said. "It has meant a great deal to me this home—in my loneliness. It means more to know that I'm welcome till—till——"

"Till you see just how to reconstruct your life again," Mrs. Hanchett finished for her. The phrase was illuminating to the girl. Reconstruction! That was what her thought-throes were all pointing her toward. Hopes, ideas, plans had been fermenting in her consciousness vaguely, and at this chance word from Mrs. Hanchett, were all rushing upward for possible outlet in action. First of all she must find a new architectural plan on which to build; then she must collect the scattered lengths of opportunity, the sheathing of application, the roofing of incentive. Thus could she build a new house of life for herself. Afar, dimly, she saw the outlines of some such structure—it was still impossible for her to call it home. Then her rash imagination plunged another step forward, crying out to inquire of her whom she expected to place in her new edifice to adorn and enjoy it? But her logic hushed the question by reminding her that the process of construction came before that of occupancy.

"It seems a nigh vain thing—this hopeless bit of after-building," Mrs. Hanchett went on. Her manner and voice were much calmer, now that she had discharged the burden of beginning. "I know—'cause I've done it myself. And what's more—I've succeeded."

The confession startled Persis. Could it be that this wisp of frail womankind had ever left her quiet by-path long enough to wander in any thicket of grief denser than the loss of a daughter that she *had* borne?

"I married young, too, much younger than you did. I was only seventeen. The boy was my senior by four years." She paused again, with far-away eyes that resembled sadness,

as "the mist resembles the rain." "We were too happy—God envied us! Two years later I laid my youth and my joy and everything but my love over yonder on the hillside," and she waved one hand lightly toward the slopes of the little Tinkham cemetery. "But the years did pass. And I did live on. And since I had no child of my own I spent the years teaching other people's. Then at last God sent me love a second time. And I just wanted you to know that it has been enough to fill my life and bring me peace—as you see."

Again she waved her delicate hand, this time toward the snug little white house with its green blinds and lattice work, the border of lilac bushes along the dirt path, and the clump of tiger lilies under the south windows. Through the open door of Nancy Drake's kitchen drifted the homely, heartsome sounds of home. Just such sights and sounds had filled the void of peacelessness in Mrs. Hanchett's disrupted life; in addition she had been able to feed her affection on the devotion of Mr. Hanchett.

"You've suffered and lost, too," Persis mused, marvelling that she had lived near such a wealth of sentiment so long unwittingly. It was not the habit of Mrs. Hanchett's kind to unstopple their hearts frequently. And knowing this, she felt the honour and sympathy implied immeasurably.

"Yes. But the point I'm trying to make is that I have won—that I have satisfied myself. And that is what you'll do, too—in time. My dear,"—Mrs. Hanchett was choice of such words: this was the first time she had ever approached Persis with endearments—"time is the great reconciler, believe me! They tell us that our faith and our religion reconcile us to such losses. But this is not so! I know, 'cause I tried—tried hard. Time is what outstrips the pace and dulls the lustre of grief. God meant it to be so, Persis. As I contemplate His goodness, surrounded here by the peace of Tinkham and my last quiet years, I come to be more and more sure that this power to forget is the supremest proof of His love and mercy for us here."

CHAPTER XXIII

PERSIS sat in rapt attention, wondering, longing to come into the fulness of the other woman's vision. Then she said, "Talk to me about Jerry, Mrs. Hanchett. You must have many memories of him that will supplement mine. Tell me what his parents were like—his mother. You know I hardly remember her—she died so young."

"There ain't much new that I could give you about Jerry. You of all women and their lovers I know, had the best and all of him. Later on in life you'll see how blest you've been in having those early years to let your memory graze on. They'll go far towards blurring the awful latter days of anguish. If you keep at your memory you can train it to jump certain weary spots in your life. Don't ever lose your perspective in glancing over your past. Don't over-dwell on two months, say, and let them overshine all the glory of twenty-six years. Next to forgetting, perspective is the most valuable belonging of human experience."

She paused, and a dreaminess came over her manner: she seemed hardly conscious of having turned her heart wrong side out in order to help reconcile a young girl to a lot like her own. Minutes passed before she returned to Persis's request. "There are two or three things about Jerry's parents I can give you," she finally vouchsafed. "Ive had 'em on my mind for weeks. In fact, I followed you out here to tell you. You see I know that in the sunshine past mistakes don't look so cruel.

"You know Jerry's father was a scholar. Probably from him Jerry took his love for books and learning. Harvey Wadhams taught school—yes—right here in the little Tinkham schoolhouse. He was a young man of few joys. All the rest

of us young folks always thought him a good sort, but offish and silent. When the war broke out he was crazy to go! But he wasn't hearty enough to get drafted—he was only nineteen, you see. Wal, he took a turn to throw up his teaching—'twas then I started in. Yes—I took the school he left. When Company C of the 19th Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers started South, Harvey Wadhams went along, too. And if you'll believe me he was that smart he worked himself up from private to colour bearer, to lef'tenant. They do say his flag is down in the State Capitol, nigh riddled to strips—he was that brave running ahead with it. I guess you could see it if you ever wanted to go hunt for it in Hartford. I've often thought how I should like to go, but it's such a long trip I guess I shall never get started.

"When the war ended Harvey staid right on in the South. He taught a couple of years in Georgia. When he come home he brought with him a slip of a wife. Folks said she was the daughter of a rich planter who had been well brought up but had lost her home and family due to war times. Anyway, she was very beautiful, and she was just my age. And she was mad in love with Harvey if I've ever seen a girl love a man.

"Wal, they settled right down on the old Wadhams homestead—Harvey had it all fixed up for his bride. Aside from his books, she was his only joy in life. He just worshipped her with a singleheartedness that shut the rest of Tinkham right out of his existence. But shortly after he had settled down to his joy, she began to show signs of queer actions. She certainly did cut up the strangest didoes that ever happened in Tinkham! Oh, I can't remember 'em all! She used to go up on the hilltop you love so well, for one thing, and sit there alone all day without moving a muscle—folks used to go to see her. Finally Harvey would have to go after her and bring her home. She was that possessed over the place that sometimes she used to get up and dress herself in the middle of the night, and grope

her way up the hill all alone. She did lots of other queer things, and finally Harvey got scared with her. He took her right down to New York, to some specialist on the nerves, I believe, who said that she was on the point of losing her mind, and that if there was any hope for her 'twas motherhood.

"I've always supposed he was calculating on the care of a child heading her off from strange doings, taking her thoughts off herself. But she was a high-minded, high-spirited sort of a young thing, as nervous and flighty as she was tall and beautiful. I've always thought Jerry took his height and his good looks from her!

"In all these years I've never got over the awful mistake that doctor made! I suppose they call it sacrificing the patient to the cause of science. Be that as it may, they forced motherhood upon her, and Jerry was the outcome. I needn't tell you that the effect of this experiment was just the opposite of what the doctor had calculated on. The physical strain of motherhood pulled the poor young thing farther under, till her mind went from bad to worse. I well remember the last night before Jerry was born."

The girl beside her sat spell-bound, harking back for catch words of her early past, trying to fit Mrs. Hanchett's version into chinks of childish memories. Every word was a resurrection. And at last from out of the haze of hearsay issued a lifelike picture of the woman who, more than any other woman on earth, had piqued and baffled her loving interestedness.

"She escaped from Harvey's watch and lay all night on the hill top, in the wildest kind of a rain and wind storm. Early in the morning they missed her and Harvey found her there—all Tinkham was up in arms with worry about her. That night Jerry was born—the child of their great and fatal love, the offspring of science."

Mrs. Hanchett paused to dispose of two teardrops that had splashed the cover of her little red book. But Persis, too

fascinated to weep, urged her on. "Wal, she went from worse to raving. I guess there wasn't a dry eye in Tinkham the day Harvey Wadhams had to put his bride away from him in a madhouse over yonder in the other part of the State. For weeks we could see the gloom of it setting down on the hills, like you see the sunshine now. In little over a year she died, and in five years Harvey died of genune heart-break if I know it when I see it. 'Twas then his brother took Jerry to bring up, and I guess you know the rest better than me."

The fateful words rang in Persis's ear. Yes, she knew the rest! She knew all now—all that she had ever cared to know and could never find out.

"Jerry certainly was the child of a young and a great love. I've sometimes thought that was what made him so winsome and lovable himself. But he was also the child of a great blunder, and you, poor dear, have helped to pay the costs." Then as afterthought she added mildly, "That's the divine thing about love—it don't count costs."

Silence fell. Then the girl turned to her searchingly. "And you never told me all this before?"

"Certainly not! 'Twas your mother's place to do that. When you came to us the affair had gone too far to brook any light meddlesomeness. Mr. Hanchett, as your legal guardian, and I spent many an evening going over whether it was our duty to tell you these unhappy facts or not, before you married Jerry. But your engagement was so long, and Jerry seemed so promising and brilliant—you both were so desperately in love, so set on marriage—so headstrong, that it seemed wisest to hope for the best and not interfere. That once settled, the only right thing was to shield you both from any thought of affliction."

In her new mental state she was able to see around the problem from the Hanchetts' standpoint. Headstrong! She grasped the significance of the word, acknowledging the justice of its application to herself; she was even able to forgive it. Granted

that she had known Jerry's parentage, would the knowledge have kept her from marrying him? With heredity staring her in the face, would she have put the reality and the glamour of love behind her? Through all the deep places of her mind and heart, there echoed a thousand times, no! Headstrong her conduct might have been, but she gloried in its very risks and dangers, since nothing had survived it except her own heartache. And she knew at last that what had impelled her to marry Jerry, defying even her long and inherent mistrust of their future, had been the very quality of her great love.

So it came about that the girl and the woman understood each other. Tacitly they smiled, to bind the understanding, and with a nod Mrs. Hanchett handed Persis the little red book. "And now you might read us a few paragraphs before Nancy Drake calls us to dinner. It's by the author of *Le Songe*. Read anywhere—it might do us good." The book happened to be a poor translation of some tidbit of French fantasy. But Persis opened it and began. She felt presently that it had done her good in that it diverted her thoughts from the clamour of feeling from which she had so proudly freed herself only an hour ago.

The afternoon of this same illuminating day she went for a walk. When she came to the path leading to the hilltop she avoided it by striking out into an old cart road that skirted the southern face of the hill. And whatever else she had on her mind she was quite unconscious that the craving for vision from actual heights had passed out of her life, that real insight had come to her as well in valley places. Probably she would have said that she changed her route because now the hilltop was associated intimately with Jerry's mother. But we who know her well know that ordinarily this association would have been just what would take her there. So insidiously does the power of insight come to us, that we do not recognise the shift in the scenery.

The slope of the hill was very gradual, and the old cart road

wound in and out charmingly through a noble grove of young chestnuts. Their long tough leaves, preserved in hollow places from winter winds, had been shifted and uncurled by a heavy fall of rain the night before, and lay spattered about, plastered down in the moist black soil. Occasionally the tassel of a chestnut plume curled up along the road side like an inert tan caterpillar. She walked on aimlessly, glad and at peace in the sunshine. Her eyes were lowered toward the ground, and in one hand she held a bit of dried stick with which she poked about for belated trails of arbutus. The moist leaves she stirred up soon dried in the sunny air and blew up against her skirt, not after the manner of leaves in the autumn, but caressingly, as if to woo attention to the happy growing things all about. The season of arbutus had passed a week ago; she found stray trails of it merely. But its place in the series of spring bloom was already taken by early anemones, the austerely pure, pale wind-flowers of the New England hills. In the shelter of a rock she found the first bed of the tender young things, and stooped to gather them as a spring offering to Mrs. Hanchett. Her eyes and fingers busy with the joy of finding, she did not perceive the tall vigourous figure winging along the cart road, until Calvin Darrach stood in front of her, holding out his great hand.

"Ah, how good it is to see you like yourself once more! Did I surprise you so in my coming?" She had started as she arose from her lowly position to greet him. "I made monstrous sounds in my strides to reach you—twice almost slipped up in this damp decay of leaves. I got my balance by grabbing hold of a dead branch that lopped off in my hand with a crash that could be heard on the other mountain side! You must have happy thoughts to be so oblivious to all else."

She had not seen him since he appeared with his automobile at Weehawken ferry to take her and Sallie across the City the day they left Bentley.

"I am not oblivious of you." She put a great deal of appreciation into the words.

Glad of her welcome he went on. "It's good to know that—after all my calamities in getting to you! Why don't you have muddy roads up this way? Do you realise I've spent the best part of a busy day trying to find you? When the thought of seeing you in these regions first struck me, my elation was set back a whole half hour by the necessity of my having to wait for the Springfield local. When I got off it, I was told that the Tinkham stage didn't meet any but mail trains. After ten minutes of wily persuasion I was able to inveigle a gawky stripling into a bargain whereby he attempted to drive me four miles through one continuous mud puddle in a little over an hour and a half. Landed here in your village I spent another fifteen minutes trying to discover where Mrs. Wadhams lived. Not a soul knew you by that name! Fortunately I remembered Persis Litchfield and got myself directed to the home of a worthy Hanchett family. I had my next blow when a rectilinear spinster informed me that you had gone for a long walk 'up the hill'! Remembering your capacity for wild goose chases, I sighed for my car to run you down! Then the Fates were kind to me! Following the directions of said rectilinear, I at last caught a glimpse of your gown through this stunning little grove, and just as I was about to salute you handsomely, a dead branch nearly brained me!" He paused eager, alert, watching her. "And now I'm still waiting to hear you *say* you're glad to see me."

"I am, immeasurably!" There was about him so much of the youngster, who, although conscious of his goodness, still likes to be told he is a nice boy, the spirit of teasing took hold of her. Smiling vividly, she said, "You're a superb sight—for Tinkham."

He took her raillery so good-naturedly that she added, "To what chance am I indebted for this honour?"

"Just as I had cajoled myself into believing that no sordidness mars my instinct for friendship, you remind me that I'm on my way home from a business trip—a try at drumming up steel trade in New England. I need not tell you that it was like trying to find duck eggs in a cuckoo's nest."

She smiled, in spite of her attempt to reduce his exuberance: it was good to hear the resonance of his voice and get the personalities of his speech, after having listened for six weeks to Mr. Hanchett discussing his wife's maladies.

"Last week I made the Rochester circuit, and week before I did Pittsburg. You see I'm shaking off all the spring trade early, so to be free—later on."

She did not need to speculate long on the cause of his desire for longer freedom later, the joy of parenthood was so palpable in his last words. And what a whiff of the outside world he brought into the grove with him! Rochester and Pittsburg! To her ruralised ear they had all the romance and farness of Cathay! And his clothes—how they spoke of New York fashion and correctness!

"But this last detour has been such a loss of valuable time that I decided to treat myself to a glimpse of you. Already I feel even with my luck."

In his eager quest of her he had slipped off his new topcoat of tan covert, and stood with it hanging over one arm, his derby in the other hand. The sunshine played over his very tall, lithe figure, his lean cheeks, square jaws, and firm mouth. The bronze abundance of his hair absorbed the sunshine, too, and his eyes flashed colour and glad observant lights. She became suddenly conscious of her clothes; it relieved her to know that she had on a good-looking shirt waist and a shapely skirt. (In Tinkham there was always such a temptation to relapse into old garments.) It was a treat, too, to see such frank blue eyes again; both the Hanchetts were brown-eyed, and rarely looked at anything except each others' faces.

But he regarded her so long and piercingly that she became embarrassed: an impulsive, defiant agitation seized her to divert his penetrating gaze and personalities from herself. She asked abruptly, "How's Nellie?"

His manner shifted, softened. "Oh, Nell is all right. At least, she's as well as we could expect. While I waited for your train in Springfield I telephoned her. I told her I was going to hunt you up, and she sent her love to you."

"Thank you. And Bentley? The hills, the cornfield, the wide view and the big quiet—are they the same?"

"Not quite the same to me—since you are not there to enjoy them. But I doubt if an outsider would find much change. That's the trouble with the Bentleyites—they abominate all change so! It's like pulling a whale's eye tooth to jog them out of their trot. I'm trying to jostle them into letting me build a new town hall now. I want a building that will do the place credit, with a clock tower and chimes in it!"

Again she had to smile: it was impossible to suppress his exuberance for long; when it did not bubble over for himself, it did for a cause. She recalled his boyish, luxuriant delight once in a new gauge on his touring car, and how for an hour he had experimented with all sorts of speed just for the fun of watching the indicator revolve. And she realized that a town hall without clock tower and chimes would be to Calvin Darrach as angels without harps to the orthodox. Above all she realised how much good his enthusiasm, his faculty for encompassing and enjoying the small as well as the great things of life, had done her. She had never shaken off her first impression of him, gained at Sallie's Thanksgiving dinner, that he had an immense capacity to lay violent hold on all the best in life. The one gap, the big disparity in his make-up arose now to moderate her impression—his choice of Nellie for a wife. There was no modifying or mitigating his mistake in mating with a woman ever incapable of joining him on high ground,

But now that motherhood was coming to crown Nellie, might it not be that at least the spirit of equality would come between them? A babe gave any woman, however frivolous and shallow, such a leverage on the deep, fine sentiments of a man's heart!

Then it occurred to her that her silent reflections were scarcely proper entertainment for a man who had come so far and at such trouble to call on her, and she asked, bravely "How's the Hospital?"

A great tenderness accompanied his manner of replying to her. "In running order. I am still tried and tempted by the way my Superintendent of Nurses does things, though."

For just the fraction of a second her impulse almost compelled her to offer herself as Superintendent, on the next vacancy: so strong was her reviving desire to amount to something. But instantly the recency of her grief, the unseemliness of returning to Bentley, the unnecessariness of her working, smothered all impulse, and she saw how totally impossible it would be for her to voice such an idea. These questions, too, about past associations were not conducive to long or spontaneous conversation. So she made effort to seem gay, and said, with charming cordiality, "I have it now! You are to stay over and have supper with us! You can take the night train home."

He looked at his watch, and pondered a moment. "Thank you! It is good to hear the echo of your hospitality once more! But the midnight train sees me in Bentley."

Again she was switched off onto the side track of recollection: she wondered whether the midnight train in Bentley was going to pursue her through life as a rival? "The rectilinear can give you the best sample of New England cooking in these regions. Really, she holds the palm! I can recommend her cold spare-rib and mince pie," she said invitingly.

"Shades of Æsculapius! Mince pie in May! It gives me indigestion pangs to think of it. I suppose you have pie for breakfast, too?"

"Either pie or doughnuts."

"So I've always heard!" And he gave such a laugh as woke up the sleeping things in the grove.

"Doesn't it tempt you?" she urged.

"It frightens me—you tempt me." He turned to her, and again the impulse to deflect his regard came to her. "But Nell may need me any time now, and it's for me to set my face toward the great city."

She liked him for sharing the reason of his haste with her so unaffectedly. Above all she liked him for this new note of spontaneity in his solicitude for his wife. In times past she had been forced to marvel how a man of such tender human needs and impulses could maintain such a level of chivalrous attention and fidelity toward a woman who unfailingly accepted the generosity of his demonstative nature and his infinite care quite as a matter of course. Nellie either met Calvin's kindnesses with a sentimental, bantering indifference, or with a peevish expectation of more in kind. Sallie Howe had once whimsically expressed it that "Nell completely coiled the seven foot Calvin around the two inch length of her little finger, and then allowed him to lay his handsome head reposefully on the flat of her pink-tinted, highly manicured, diminutive finger nail." But those who knew Calvin Darrach well, his men friends, and others who analyze human manners and mainsprings more keenly than Sallie was wont, knew that his unfaltering fidelity to his shallow, selfish little wife was the outcome of his natural courtesy and fineness, his chivalry toward all womankind; that in his heart he was often an unsatisfied, homeless, and lonely man. Toward the world in general he maintained an open-hearted, cheerful optimism: the very essentials of his make-up forbade him to ever grow sour and indifferent. But while his kindness toward his wife never faltered, his frankness never permitted him to announce a large happiness with her, or to proclaim that he had a deep devotion

for her, or that there was not something very concrete lacking in his life, as his demonstrative nature would have compelled him to do had he felt any of these satisfactions or thrills with her. So by his very silence on all matters regarding his marriage he convicted himself of disappointment: so alien to him was it to keep silent over those things which did bring him great joy.

After the repetition of his refusal to stop over for supper in Tinkham, they sauntered on a little way. She flicked at leaves and passing things with her bit of dried stick, and Calvin filled his lungs with the winy air, his glance sweeping the horizon comprehensively. The bulwark of the Holyoke Range, the blue haze on Mount Tom, the sheen on the Connecticut, the broad valley meadows, red barns and snug white farm-houses, and over all the promise of May!

"What a river you have! What hills, and what verdure! I see now what has brought back your beauty to you. It is this air and this wideness! It all spells peace. But I need not warn you that too much peace means destitution. You must rest here a whole year—just to get your bearings. Then you must return to the world. We need you!"

"Sometimes I do hear voices calling me back." She remembered the impetus of the inspiration that came to her that morning under the old cherry tree. "But my wings are clipped, you see. I can't soar any more—I can't even fly. I remind me of an old pet crow that—that a friend of mine once caught for me when I was a child. To keep it in our yard, that it might not fly too far and too joyously, we mutilated its wings. So it just bounced and wabbled about on our grass, clucking and cawing to its mates that flapped their strong wings merrily and sailed past overhead. And it just stayed there in our yard, content with what food and attention we threw it, till it died."

She dropped her wind-flowers and he stooped to gather them out of the damp, black earth for her. When he handed them

back to her he said, "I am in just the mood to tell you something, and it is this. Of all your qualities that appeal to me so strongly, just now I adore your bravery, your superb courage, more than anything else in the world." He whispered it, as if he feared the quiet hills would hear him.

The six taciturn weeks of Tinkham had brought her so little of spontaneous appreciation, her eyes filled with tears. Remembering one other time when she had asked him not to be too kind to her, he hurried on.

"You must not ever get the notion established that you can thrive and grow here in Tinkham! At present it is just what you need. But remember that the heart of these hills is cold; they're reposing here after the chaotic labour of upheaval and formation in the far past. They don't throb with real pulse beats—and that's the kind of companionship you need. You must have inspiration, youth, joy.

"That old couple down in the cottage are no fit company for you—they leave you out of it too much. They are smothered, entombed in their affection for each other. I had a good chance to observe your surroundings while they held a family council, rectilinear included!—to see what was best to do with me. And he—whatever his name is—was that engrossed swathing her with shawls of different sizes, and crooning love words into her pale ear, that he hardly saw me, although I was ushered into the 'settin' room' right valiantly by the austere spinster. Egad, but hasn't she a figure like an old apple tree!"

She laughed gayly at his version of Nancy Drake, at the same time wondering if anything ever escaped him?

"You must not forget, please, that when you are all rested you are to reconstruct your life. I've seen so many splendid, strong natures warped out of all shape by too much lonely grief. And out in the world there is great need of natures that ring as true as yours does."

His "reconstruct" startled her. She marvelled not so much

that he and Mrs. Hanchett should both apply it to her in the same day, as that two people so totally unlike should apply it at all.

"And now forgive my preachment—and good-by!"

He held out his hand to her, smiling his farewell.

"Don't go!" Her tone was more regretful than insistent.

"I must."

He saw her disappointment, was elated by it, and tried to divert her from it by saying, "See your river! Doesn't it cleave those hills neatly? It looks just like a great, smooth speedway paved with steel. That's why it appeals to me."

She started back with him, and for a moment they were silent. Then he looked at his watch hurriedly, frowned, and turned to her with, "I shall have to ask you to leave me here. If it takes my nags as long to sluice that mud going as it did coming, I have barely time to make my train. You see I have already stayed with you just as long as I can."

In his face there was no repulse; just the need of haste and the surety that she would understand. Still, through his haste shone his eagerness to get home, his joy of parenthood so long delayed and despaired of; and envy pulled her heart strings so tightly that they hurt. But in a moment she was generous enough to put the ache aside. She held out her hand, "I understand! Always stop over to see us when you go through Springfield. You've helped me much—just as you always do. Good-by! And I shall pray that all goes well with you."

He did not take her hand, but lifted his hat and held it so, high and to one side, for a moment. Then he went bounding through the grove, crashing over light underbrush to short-cut the distance. She stood watching him make time, wondering if he would look back at her. She saw him pass through the gate into the garden, and by some mysterious tie of association, some impress of her presence and preference, he paused under the old cherry tree. He looked back searchingly to be sure she

was watching him, smiled, and waved his derby. Then he disappeared behind the lilac hedge, and a moment later she saw him leap into the dilapidated, mud-laden buggy. She watched the farm boy apply his vigour and a whip to outdo speed along the dry places in the River Road, and presently behind a bend companionship vanished.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE morning of her wedding anniversary 'Lisha Apley's clerk approached Persis sitting on the narrow convolvulus-shaded porch of the Hanchett house. In one hand dangling awkwardly behind him he carried a plump letter from Sallie Howe. This he presented grinningly with the remark that he "guessed she had a pritty stiddy correspondent som'ers daoun country." As she took her letter from his gummy hand, its postmark, Bentley, New York, so absorbed her thoughts that she failed to acquiesce in his attempt at sociability. Naturally he accepted her silence as a rebuff and again set her down as "stuck up and citified." He therefore relapsed into the same bashful amazement with which he had regarded her four years ago. A girl who had no variety in her wardrobe other than black dresses, who got so many special deliveries, and had once bought twenty yards of gingham all in one piece, baffled his comprehension.

Of all places and at this time of the year, why should Sallie be in Bentley? Could it be that because of Nellie's advancing trials Sallie had relaxed her slashing criticisms and had gone to Bentley to pay a cousinly and kindly visit? Persis's first impulse was to open the letter before she signed for it. Then the long, lonely day stretched out before her and she decided to keep it until afternoon, as a child saves a bit of confection to keep under his pillow after he goes to bed. The morning had come gloriously and then had lowered. But in Tinkham nature rarely sulks, and a swift shower, while restoring freshness and sunshine to the earth, had also kept her indoors half of the forenoon. The green room had seemed hardly adequate to her mood; a belated cold had closeted Mrs. Hanchett for the

day; and Nancy Drake, sleeves rolled to wizened elbows, was in the heat of her annual bout of dyeing carpet rags, that the long, lamp-lighted winter evenings ahead might not find her without employment. Standing beside a blazing fire all of a June morning, steaming over a brass kettle full of the infusion of boiling water and apple tree bark, watching, testing, poking, lifting yards of old sheeting and bits of cheese-cloth to see that they "took" a handsome shade of canary yellow was hardly conducive to the state of mind and heart that offers condolence to the loveless. And Persis, sitting there on the porch alone, felt more desolate than ever her solitariness indicated.

All the morning she had been playing a little game with herself, bravely warding off the day, its desolation, its memories, striving to keep them all until the afternoon, when she planned to take them off somewhere alone, weep with them, sort them over, and sift them out. So far Sallie's letter was the only visible human sign that anybody but herself had remembered her wedding day. Therefore the letter was not to be lightly disposed of; it should be kept for the climax of the day, for her consolation after she had emptied her heart of bitterness and loneliness somewhere in the wide quiet of outdoors.

Immediately after the "picked-up dinner" (Nancy Drake always served picked-up dinners the days she pickled, preserved, and dyed) Persis went upstairs to change her dress for a white one, in memory of the bridal gown of a year ago. Then tucking Sallie's letter in her girdle, she set out, hatless and without explanation. She had a strong, impelling desire to do something very unusual or far-fetched; to feel something quite different and untried; to go to some place untrod. She felt that to have done any one of these things would have relieved her immeasurably. But to commit the extraordinary or erratic was conspicuous in a town so small that every right hand knew with precision what the left was doing: to feel was to aggravate her state. And how go to a new spot in the place

where one had been born and reared? She decided that she could at least vary the direction of her walk, and instead of striking out across the orchard and through the chestnut grove to hillward, she went exactly the opposite way, passing through the little cluster of homes in the village, and taking a road that led parallel to the River and east of the hill. She calculated that by the time she had skirted the base of the hill and come in on her customary path homeward she would have walked about six miles.

Beyond the village the right hand slope took the form of rolling meadows of sparse June grass, already blanching, that thickened into sturdy fields of timothy as they reached the richer soil of the valley below. Teetering blithely on the spindling grass stalks was a flock of bobolinks, their throats inflated with music. Her coming interrupted them; with a thrill of fear they fluttered a moment uncertainly, then a black and white dart flashed across the path, and from the low branches of a gnarled old apple tree, cock-eyed, they peered at her. Presently they took up their chorus again and the fuller notes of it came to her sweetly long after she had passed. By going off alone she had thought to submerge her consciousness of external and present or future things in the sentiment and sacredness of memory. It had seemed fitting to her that she should give up a large part of the day to mourning for the past, for dead hopes, and for Jerry. But as she strode majestically along the sunsplashed, dustless road, with the joy of June emanating from every nook and turn, with the sky hanging so low above her that it seemed almost tangible, with the metallic clatter of mowing machines softened harmoniously by distance into the chirp and song of live things by the roadside, she did not find that her emotions vibrated exquisitely to grief. She felt rather a dynamic impulse, a pleasant exhilaration attuned more in accord with the spirit of the season. She thought that she ought to weep freely, to miss Jerry poignantly, then and

there, to re-crucify her hopes and desires. And being unable to do this she wondered if she were guilty of forgetting and outgrowing so soon?

She quickened her pace to outstrip such a possibility, and in half an hour found herself quite breathless and hot, ready to sit down in the next place that invited rest. This she did, on a big flat rock near the edge of a superb woodlot, a two and a half mile stretch of hard wood fit for the spires of a king's navy. And here in the mellow shade of ash and beech trees, in the half lights of spruce and hemlock shadows, her old habit of reflection, her tendency toward musings, returned to her fully. She became conscious with a new clearness that her early scheme of life had utterly failed her. This had been the realization of her ideals. She had squandered the first abundant flush of youth, twenty-six years, in learning how false a system hers had been! Life actual, life lived, had proved almost every one of her ideals, however seemingly high and fine, to be arbitrariness, distortions of real conditions and relationships, irrelevancies, dreams. She now for the first time saw how infinitely better it was to realize one's self instead of one's ideals, however imperfect and slow in maturing this self might be. That she had not realised herself had been the base of her personal distress during grief-times, although then she had been able to voice her state only in the outcry that there was nothing but chaos in her experiences—no unity, no continuity in all her life. And what she once had been wont to regard as the cruelty of fate she now saw was merely her failure to adapt herself to actualities, to accept life as she found it.

With this new key to the situation, she went back over her life and unlocked some very formidable and hitherto unopened doors. But the jolt backward was so sudden that she put up her hand to steady her heart, and by so doing felt the corner of Sallie's letter in her girdle. With a rush of insight she came into a right conception of her old friend at last. Until now she

had cherished an offish, unforgiving attitude toward Sallie and her unfailing attempts to "make good," allowing her capacity to lie to overshadow all her other qualities, undeniably good. Once in one of Jerry's tempestuous settlements of some point in which she had demanded of him a higher standard than he thought necessary or just, he had impetuously told her that she was "most unpleasantly exacting and hard to please." He had even added that this was particularly true in the case of the people she loved. The phrase had always rankled in her memory and bobbed up now to taunt her newly acquired humility. Likewise Sallie's passionate protest that she had been forced to lie in order to keep a friendship that meant everything to her, in order to shield herself from merciless judgment, rang in her ears. When two people that loved her so well had each been forced to comment on the strain of her demands and exactions, did it not mean that she was more at fault than they if the strain ever became so intense that their morals snapped?

All of Sallie's good points ranged themselves before her. In addition to a realization of large kindnesses received came the individual traits that she had loved in Sallie; her generosity, not only of money and hospitality, but of estimates of others. Sallie was always so willing to give everybody the benefit of a doubt! Making gay jest of others' foibles and shortcomings was quite different from sitting in high judgment over them morally. The one exception to her easy charity for everybody was her attitude toward Nellie Darrach. And Persis knew that a large part of Sallie's criticism was due to an old rivalry as harmless as it was cousinly. Sallie's quaint good cheer, ready sympathy and pithy advice began to submerge her unfortunate tendency to exaggerate—to "compose," as Calvin Darrach had once named this trait. That her habit of exaggeration had landed her in a hotbed of lies was merely logical: moreover it was the one serious fault in a nature otherwise admirable.

Was it quite fair to keep Sallie, slipping up on one moral issue, forever beyond the confines of regard and equality, when so much of her was so good and lovable?

And under all these traits shot through Sallie's luminous wit, her love of fun, her sprightly appreciation of a dramatic situation. Pitted over against these characteristics Persis saw her own gullibility, her callow willingness to believe literally in things she liked (despite her keen discrimination against things she disliked), her unflinching, rectified insistence on virtue unequivocal. Really such rectitude challenged sinning! Her imagination even permitted her to see all the sport that Sallie's dramatic soul must have found on such native soil of unqualified, primeval trust in human nature. All these simplifications had visited her while she sat resting by the road side. And now that the power to simplify had graciously come to her, when she took to the road again another revelation stared her in the face. This was that life is merely a game of give and take, happiness coming in direct proportion to the amount given. Applying this new measurement to her friendship with Sallie she was confused and ashamed to find how little she had given. For the most part she saw herself for nine years the receptacle that had retained the overflow of Sallie's affection and care. This indeed had been of some service, since it was a necessity to Sallie to love and care for someone demonstratively. But when she tried to reckon what concrete deeds she had done in kindness for Sallie, paucity of data hindered her attempt. This certainly was not compatible with the perfection of friendship that, until the lie, she had always enjoyed with Sallie. Now she knew that the highest expression of love and friendship lay in service.

Hereupon her reflections reached the very supreme climax of simplification, in that she saw that nobody is perfect. This truth was so sublimely white to her now, that she wondered if always light rather than darkness had not obscured her vision?

She had set out in life with the notion that the people she loved were perfect, that she loved them just because of their perfection. When she realised that it had taken her more than a quarter of a century to learn that even good mortals have some besetting sin that if sufficiently wrought upon will trip them up, she was astounded by her own stupidity.

The point was that one must not narrow friendship down to one woman, and then demand perfection of her. It was unreasonable to expect all the graces, all the virtues, bound up under one poor human skin. Setting out with her one-girl and one-man theory as all that was required to constitute friendship ideal, she had almost entirely shut everybody else out of her heart. What few people had insisted on tracking through her life had gotten very little farther than the vestibule of her being. She saw now how she had always dispossessed women from her life, not on the ground of inferiority or unsuitability, but because her heart was already sufficiently tenanted. This she had done in Bentley, with Miss Atwood and Nellie. She knew, too, that if there had been princesses and angels in Bentley she would have held them off in quite the same way, icily, as with a ten foot pole. After all, this had been her punishment: to be left so utterly stranded and desolate when both of the people she had staked her faith and her love on had ultimately failed her.

Hereafter she must take more people into her life and heart. She could do this; it was not that her heart was too narrow to hold the annexation. It was only that in her concentration and oligarchy of love she had made too sharp distinctions, too few choices of applicants.

Hereafter, too, she must never make the mistake of expecting too much of mortals. If her nature still demanded perfection, was to be satisfied with nothing more or less, she must make a composite friendship—from the complex and compiled qualities of excellence in all her friends, she must construct a transcen-

dental somebody, who should assuage her perfection-loving soul and at the same time not disturb her confidence in people as they are. In other words, she must love her friends for what they were rather than break her heart because they came short of what she wished them to be.

At this stage in her ruminations her attention was checked by a flying squirrel that flapped across the branches on her left. She stopped short to watch his curious progress, noting that it followed an enchanting little trail which she remembered was a short cut to the hilltop. She plunged impulsively through the bosky opening, trying to keep the squirrel in sight, the lusty green path flies buzzing up resentfully against her white skirt. In a few moments she came to a clearing, topmost and sightly, and before her lay the spacious strip of Connecticut Valley. She could see the ruins of the old grist mill about half a mile below the Hanchett house. She knew that the old mill-stone lay thrown out on the river side in a heap of waste iron, like an old man turned off his job because of age. On its ample top she and Jerry used to crack butternuts, and on it, too, he used to stand in the days of spring freshets when the River roared high and overwashed its banks, to cut sprouts of pussy willows for her. Moreover this particular clump gave the earliest "wring" of willow whistles in Tinkham. She looked at it now, lovingly: it had grown to be a cluster of graceful young trees!

Yonder on the opposite river bank stood the old white pine, very tall and quite bare of branches except for a bushy top-knot. Back in her first decade it had been the only tree in the neighbourhood that she could not climb; it was also the ideal spot for a crow's nest. She remembered yet her childish rage because Jerry could shin up it and handle the pretty blue eggs all splashed with chocolate, while she had to stay on the ground and watch him. There was the boulder where they used to play "duck on the rock" and give each other barked shins with their petrified, refractory fowl. Here was the ruins of their

old fort—these stones had been placed by Jerry's very hands! Now some were moss grown and some had slipped away, leaving perilous gaps in the side of the fort. From it they had withstood fearsome onslaughts of imaginary Mohegans. And later, when chivalry had supplanted warfare in Jerry's breast, he used to send her along the hill a way and then swoop down upon her valiantly and bear her off knightfied to the safety of his castle. Another year—and mad with jealousy of a fictitious rival, he had walled her up in the fort, gone off, and forgotten her for hours passed in tears not playful.

CHAPTER XXV

IT WAS these familiar, natural things that wrought upon her emotions powerfully. She knelt, inclining her body on the fort, one cheek pressed against a stone of it, her slender arms extended along its sides, a white cross-like figure against its gray mass. Long continent of tears, she now wept freely, sobbingly, abandonedly—poured out her loneliness on the spot sacred to companionship, till there was nothing left in her heart but vacuum. Then she arose and sat down on an overturned stone of the fort. A stillness, audible, palpable, hung over the hilltop, and involuntarily she responded to it by turning her head as one does who harkens for small, still sounds. But her mood was pitched high above the hearing of common things, and she listened instead for the cry of her unborn children, for Jerry's footsteps, and the echoes of his career down the years to come.

The view, the place, the air, the sunshine glared with sameness, intimacy. It was hard for her to believe that she had not been there for four years. Then she had come wondering how she could ever live without Jerry three years; and her wonderment had ended in her decision to be a trained nurse. The problem, like the setting, was still unchanged; only now, instead of three years she was wondering how she could ever live without him a lifetime.

Six months and three days! It was not a long time to have been married. She clung to the three days jealously, passionately, as something that not even the gods could snatch from her, as a dying novice might clutch her crucifix. She bent her head down till it rested on her arms crossed on her knees, and again her hot tears fell freely. She wondered if any of them

mingled in the earth with those of Jerry's mother? Surely the young thing who had wandered there in her misplaced motherhood had wept. The thoughts that sprang from her wonderment quieted her: the woman who had borne him and the woman who had buried him. It seemed to her fitting that hey both be drawn irresistibly to the same place because of him.

Once more the triumphant part of her life with him surged over her; aside from the last ruthless two months their lives had ranged over long stretches that were care-free and happy. She was groping at Mrs. Hanchett's advice to keep life in good perspective—to make the joyous, rapturous bits of it send the bitter, grievous parts back vanquished. And as with Sallie, she saw much of Jerry's case that had always rankled and baffled her, unfolding in a new and a right light.

She had always resented that he had been fated to die so young. Now the duration of his life sank into background. His dissolution became rather a completion, a realization—there had been so much that he *had* had. She wondered, indeed, if some mysterious prescience of his early end had not been the force that had always hurried him on so, impelling him to advancement, driving him from preconceived ideas to rapid achievement, without lingering too long in the intermediate steps? Despite his vacillations and instability he had managed to realize many of his dreams. He had realized his dream of good scholarship, as his rapid progress in college testified, and in that he had compelled his long career at college to land him in the coveted appointment at Bentley. It had been far from insignificance and incompletion that a man of twenty-nine had won and filled, even for a pitiably short time, a fair-sized parish in a suburb of New York City. He had experienced good fellowship, as his almost daily recollection of certain old friends had always reminded her; frequent exchanges of friendly letters or messages were constantly flitting across his busy or his troublous days. He had bettered his fore-ordination

to early and quick death, too, in that he had loved early, passionately and single-heartedly, won the girl he loved, and realized her as his wife in his own home. All his great impersonal, chivalrous love of womankind had concentrated itself upon her. She held up her head proudly, happily, with the fresh consciousness of this. For a quarter of a century this had been so. And down the remainder of her days, whatever they had in store, the surety of his love went ringing jubilantly defying death, time, and change.

The stillness took up the echo of his farewell to her, "love you—love you—better than anything or anybody on earth"—and the distance hurled them triumphantly from hilltop to mountain crest. By him she had entered into the spirit of love, even if no embodiment of it was left to her. "The flesh profiteth nothing, it is the spirit that quickeneth."

He had cheated a vicious destiny, too, in that he had experienced his home instincts. She recalled his joy in arranging his book shelves, his interest in the angle of certain pictures and artistic effects, his glee the afternoons the Swedish woman went "out" and he could help his wife get dinner. She recalled the day the telephone had been put in the parsonage, and Jerry, delighted with his new toy, and Calvin Darrach, readily responsive to another's pleasure, had rung each other up every ten minutes with nonsensical messages all through the evening. He had bettered a rapid disintegration in that he had realized his ideal of work—service for others. He had snatched his short opportunity and had applied it to the development and organization of his work in Bentley. She knew that the thrill of his memory and enthusiasm would quicken the parish work and grow to good fruitage, especially among the young people. While doing this he had also won the affectionate appreciation of the members of his parish, as her pile of condolence notes from them proved. And he had held fast to his religion, despite all chaos of nerves and foreshadowing of decay. If he

had overdone this and succumbed, a victim to religion, he had at least kept his faith whole.

Parenthood he had not known. But then, he had not desired it in the degree that she had: he had been so bound up in the possibilities of his work, his ambition to grow into something great; he had been so content to continue just in her love, jealous rather, lest some new force should interrupt or lessen it. It was a maudlin pity that spent itself on someone who did not get what he did not greatly want.

Since it had been his fate to stand up and take the penalty of unfortunate heredity, he had done this valiantly, with good courage, and a fair amount of worthy achievement and success, although the time alloted him was so abbreviated. Yes; undeniably it had been his lot to die young: no one had to bear more than his own destiny, after all. It had been hers to love him, and, loving him well, to suffer and mourn.

She compared the state of the Chinese lily which he had always chosen as his life's emblem, with her own slow ripening: she did not grow by spurts, but by grades. If she had been cut off young, her fate would have been woful indeed, for she had realized so little of herself. But with Jerry a few years more or less counted little, because he had entered into the spirit of success and life actual and lived. Always in childhood his conceptions had been so much quicker and clearer than hers. There had been flashes of the white light about several of his conceptions, after all. A foretaste of life he had had, one full, clear draught of it. On his tongue the flavour of life had never grown flat: in the bottom of his cup were no bitter dregs—since ravage had mercifully shifted his momentary realization of their separation into kindly mania. Moreover, he had never been obliged to watch his golden winecup turn into a mug of ground glass. All this had been spared him. Should not these mercies become to her a rich consolation forever?

There had been times when she had bitterly arraigned herself for her failure in procuring medical help for Jerry early enough to have saved him. Now she saw that no trip to the fabulous hunting lodge, no care, no doctors, could have saved him. She had also chided herself because, not realising what fate was threatening him, she had given way to impatience, had taken too little care of him. Now she knew, proudly, that no woman could have done more for him, or loved him half as well.

The keynote of his life, then, had been service. With one of those detached side-flashes of memory she recalled that service, too, had been Luke Chamberlain's watchword. Luke Chamberlain! She had never seen or heard from him since the day he had bade her good-by in the operating amphitheatre. It had hardly been worth his while to run away so fast and so far in order to avoid her marriage with another man. If he had waited a bit for her, now? Had destiny tricked her again by sending him off so far beyond her reach, now that she was free to listen to him? Then the genuineness of her old sentiment for the young doctor swept back over her momentarily. She wished that they might find each other yet—it would simplify all the rest of life so! Then she bowed her head in shame and put the idea from her, as a desecration to love and a violation of the day, although in her impulse toward him there was more of her crystallised idea of service and her desire to work with him, than of any instinct of the blood or union. Jerry had so cleaned her heart of love.

Then she raised her head and gazed once more on the silent steadfast hills. And again something of their serenity passed into her.

She no longer felt that the fates had played a remorseless, fickle game with her. The invasion of some unseen thing bringing calamity into her life seemed less imminent. The inferno of her grief became a region remote. The demonology of her

anguish-stricken days faded into something less evil, more obscure. The sensation that somewhere in her rearward was cast a drag-net of woes was slipping off her heart. Comparing her own experience, its dismay, strivings and perishings, with the mediocrity and mess her observation had taught her marriage might be reduced to, its ideals sunk in small aims and selfish ends, she rejoiced in her own high tragedy, preferring it. The coming years failed to look so hideously despondent. She began to see the infinite romance of them even in a Tinkham setting. She saw, too, how majestic was her loneness, how ideal her woe. She knew now that the past years had been for her a preparation, a probation, a chastening, rather than an attempt at completeness. Surely there was somewhere for her yet the glow of fulfilment?

A great trust in her future, the first she had known for years, began to overshadow her, now that grief had ceased to be her ritual. And drifting along on the even current of her new faith she came into *rapport* with Sallie Howe, whose life had been all evenness and drift. The letter in her girdle—surely now was the time to enjoy it. She broke the seal, and the familiar handwriting fairly poured out into her lap, so voluminous the pages.

"Dear Child:

"Such times! For once, though, I am not desperate to know whether God really does expect us mortals to understand His doings. But first of all let me prove to you that in spite of all the commotion and excitement I am not forgetting your wedding day. I am not trying to lessen anything—I just wanted you to know, dear, that Sallie remembers and is sorry—so sorry.

"Now then, for the hub-bub! Tuesday night poor Nell died in childbirth. Think of it, Persis, after we've all scorned her possibilities so many years! How like Nemesis it all is—sort of a logical judgment on her for shirking her duties so long. And besides, it really would be most illogical to expect her to emerge from positive perils, since headaches and simple influenzas always 'threatened' to dismember her. Dear Mamma

was up from Baltimore for the occasion, to be sure, and when things began to go ill with Nell, Calvin telephoned for me. I toddled up, of course, though there was little enough I could do. You'd have a queer feeling in the pit where your heart is if you could see Cal with the Babe. She is a beauty! Nell quite outdid herself. I have practically decided that it would be almost worth while to pass on, as penalty for producing anything so perfect. Still this old life is good enough for me! At least, I am thankful that Cal has a bit of femininity that promises to be unalloyed pleasure to him. My dear, Cal is a perfect study! At times he quite captivates, then totally baffles my powers of analysis. At first I decided he was becomingly anxious about Nell, and later properly penitent for the part he had played in her undoing. Then just as I was beginning to feel sorry for him and marvel how he *could* be so abjectly downcast over his release from a bondage of nine years—isk! there he was, radiantly possessive of his Babe, paying it the most attention, planning all sorts of lovely care for it! It certainly is beautiful to watch him with it. He hovers over it, croons to it, pats it, and devours the bassinette with the eyes of his heart. He really can't keep away from it more than half an hour. He's so picturesque!

"You must please believe me when I tell you that poor Nell was hardly buried when he gave orders to have his own house opened up. Next day he dashed off to New York for a housekeeper and a trained baby-nurse. I'm not squeamish over appearances as you know, and I fully appreciate what Calvin has put up with from his peevish, 1 x 2 wife. But there were times, Persis, when Cal's eagerness to escape from the boarding house and get settled in his own home seemed to me indecently hasty. Still, I know he was always homesick, and I shall not judge him by the same standard I'd apply to my cock-sparrow man—for instance! And after all, when you think how Nell did keep him under her little thumb, subjugated to her puny whims, serving her like a Roman slave, it is only human nature that he should subdue his grief to joy of his home and the Babe. To me there was always something knightly in his chivalry to Nell—he had so little inspiration! Poor Nell—free at last from smelling-salt bottles, impossible faints, and grippy draughts! I really wouldn't speak so cousinly of her to anybody but you, dear. One should not be convicted of throwing mud at angels! And that reminds me—do you suppose Nell will ever find another nice, masculine angel who will fetch and carry for her as gallantly as Calvin did!

"I forgot to tell you that the Babe weighs eight pounds! Has blue eyes exactly like her daddy, and is quite robust. She does look as if nerves

and drugs and draughts were no concern of hers. Strange, isn't it? And wasn't it like Nell to lose her life in one last spasmodic act of self-renunciation—probably the only truly unselfish thing she ever did unpremeditatedly in all her life! It makes one feel like a youngster in the dark—"the goblins 'll get you"——

"I'm going back to father to-morrow. We're in the cottage at the beach. He's aging fast and doesn't like me out of his reach long. His splendid eyesight is failing, and I slay off the dull hours reading aloud to him. How I wish you were to be with us! Remembering that you love handwork I'm embroidering you a shirt waist, hoping you'll get it before fashion discards all such. For downright dissipation—wild, devilish badness!—I go sailing with the cock-sparrow man. Yes, the identical one that has haunted me for the last fourteen years! Exciting summer, isn't it? Pray for me—and for him! Lest some day in a fit of ennui I send him spinning end over end out of the boat into the briny blue Atlantic.

"When will you come to visit us? Father keeps asking for you. For a pastime he has had built on both ends of the cottage piazza a sort of an extension—a cross between a pagoda and a grain elevator. Often he grieves because you are not there to enjoy it with us. Let me know if I can do anything for you. Pray for Cal, too, even if he doesn't seem to need it! He'll have his hands full enough bringing up a girl baby. I think I never in my life came so near being disgusting as I did yesterday. I had it on the tip of my tongue to invite Cal to come and live with us. I thought he'd be such a comfort to father, and I should have loved it to have charge of the baby. It was just at this point that Calvin dashed off and began to telephone for renovators and housekeepers and baby-nurses! Nothing but kind fate kept me from being so officious. And so goes the game down this way. *Au revoir*, child, and all the love you'll take from SALLIE."

The quick and the dead! The primeval, eternal differentiation, the old solemn formula of commitment from one state to the next. The strange God that had strapped a man's shoulders with a newborn babe and had left a woman's arms empty, with no impress of helpless head against her breast!

Persis's thoughts flashed back to her dinner party, the party she had given for Calvin and Nellie in order to divert Jerry from the ruthless, undefined something that was wearing him

out. Surely that evening an onlooker would have found it difficult to separate from such abundant youth the two already marked by doom's hand. Even then the processes of life and decay were already at work that were to halve the group in six months' time.

Well, like herself, Calvin was free at last. Unlike her, he was not alone. Picturesque—Sallie had found his liberation! But having experienced a like picturesqueness herself, she saw him with an understanding more potential. She wondered if he would follow his own advice to her, wondered if when he reconstructed his life he would not do it "nearer to the heart's desire?" They had both borne much of worry and loneness and grief in the name of love, long, uncomplainingly, silently, heroically. They both still possessed youth, indomitable courage, and high capacity to enjoy a comely destiny. Like herself, she knew Calvin would resist gloom, would purpose to wrest his fair share of happiness from fate and to pitch his life along the lines of the "strenuous peace for those who will fight their way through to it." When she tried to analyse the attachment between him and his wife she was forced to fall back on Sallie's solution, that Nell first captivated Cal's fancy because she was "well-bred" and "refined." After all, their case was not uncommon. Men who have seen much of women and the world, in their determination to eliminate from their homes all traces of coarseness, often overestimated delicacy, marrying hyper-sensitive, super-refined women who turned out to be, instead of ornaments and inspirations, invalids and burdens.

Surely some side of Calvin's rich, complex nature had been filled and appeased, some boyish fancy of his had found embodiment in the little blond, blue-eyed, oversexed beauty called Nellie. But try as she would she could not make the source of their union start above the plane of sentiment: theirs had been so preëminently a sentimental marriage. All the other

possibilities of marriage, comradeship, inspiration—all the various equalities and congenialities of intellect and spirit had been so alien to their alliance. She turned away from her speculations, gathering up the communication in her lap, and remembering the very actual comfort and support Calvin had once been to her, she felt a great longing to comfort him in some like way. But mindful of Sallie's bare escape from officiousness and the warmth the nestling baby would keep in his heart, she decided on a letter of sympathy, and let concreteness go by. She left the hill without further ceremony, throwing a kiss back over her shoulder. She went at once to the green room and untrunking her writing materials drew the lone chair up to the gable window. The twilight was yet unborn, and dimly she saw how to write two notes, one to Calvin Darrach and one to Sallie Howe—the first note of hearty response and equality she had sent to Sallie since their quarrel.

Another year passed before anything attractive or impelling took Persis away from Tinkham. This year was merely the elaboration of the rest and freedom and balance that diminution of trouble was restoring to her. Her days were divided between small cares, study, and exercise. Mrs. Hanchett enjoyed daily touches of her nurse's skill as a pussy-cat enjoys stroking under its chin. A time came, too, when a lift on household burdens and the cooking was not amiss with Nancy Drake. While hazing over the bogs and boulders of her side-hill farm in quest of barberries, high bush bilberries, and herbs, she had slipped and sprained one gaunt ankle. During enforced idleness she had eased her nervous soul by sniffing at the pungent odours that wafted in to her nostrils through the open kitchen door. On one side of the door-post hung bunches of drying herbs—pennyroyal, red hardhack, boneset, and little clumps of elecampane roots, all tied in neat bundles with different coloured strings. (Behind the kitchen door hung a little calico bag that Nancy Drake kept as unfailingly full of

odd bits of twine and string as was the widow's cruse of oil.) When her medicines were dried sufficiently in the sunlight Nancy Drake was wont to transfer them to garret rafters, an ample supply of winter restoratives. The bulk of them was never put to use; Mrs. Hanchett "doctored" with a nerve specialist in Springfield, and Nancy Drake's proudest boast was that she had "had no doctor following around after her for the past thirty year!" Her annual replenishment of pharmacy was merely the necessity and solace of her thorough soul.

Through all the weeks of elevated position and repair during her sprain, Nancy Drake dried hops. From where she sat she poked them about and from relay to relay of newspapers, with her cane. Also during this trying period she made hop pillows, there being in Tinkham two or three people for whose sleeplessness she was profoundly solicitous. Meanwhile, she kept her mind busy by reading her almanac; by teaching Persis how to make caraway cookies and to preserve the fatal bilberries; and by instructing her in the religious rites connected with the preparation of Boston baked beans. At moments when her ankle pained excruciatingly, Nancy Drake was wont to declare that her foot ached "like Sam Hill." Moreover, whenever she wished to emphasise or take oath, she always punctuated and swore by this same gentleman; likewise, when anything exceedingly funny happened she always laughed "like Sam Hill." This personage, aside from being fictitious and of obscure origin, was also of ambiguous sex. For example: during canning and pickling seasons, she was more than apt to "work like Sam Hill." Since this was early and late and hard, a masculine element might seem to attach to Sam's make-up. On the other hand, when the minister called on Mrs. Hanchett and Nancy Drake went to let him in without the precaution of first peeking through the blinds, if her personal appearance chanced to fall below her standard of tidiness,

she always returned to her kitchen much flustrated, casting opprobrium upon herself by the remark that she "looked like Sam Hill." Obviously there could be nothing masculine in Nancy Drake's lank, drab calico wrapper, or in the tea leads that bound up wisps of her gray front hair. Whereby it might be inferred that Sam Hill had veered around to femininity.

With Thanksgiving came an invitation from Sallie Howe: Calvin Darrach would come for dinner, and wouldn't Persis please accept? But for some reason she could hardly explain she dreaded to meet Calvin—dreaded the sight of their black garments together. Above all she was averse to hearing his exultation over his daughter and wondered if this meant that she was ungenerous? So she stayed in Tinkham and spent the holiday trying to decide whether its positive, defined desolation was worse or better than the harrowing uncertainty of a year ago. Meanwhile an early winter had set in and at Christmas-tide a prodigious fall of snow so obliterated the little town that the hill slopes looked like a desert camping-ground and the pine trees like new tents. The maple-sugar orchards slept sombrously, and the drifts of country roads lay on a level with the zig-zag tops of rail fences. The Connecticut River, its pretty moods and graces congealed to passivity, formed a solid cake of ice that the farmers, blocked from their usual places of travel, were using for a roadway. In a farther bend of the river, where the bleak winds had swept the ice bare, a throng of skaters flitted down and across the natural rink in awkward swoop or graceful swirl, as the case was.

Despite her resolutions to take Christmas calmly, as she watched the skaters a sharp twist at her heart reminded her that she had better go to help Nancy Drake make the pop-corn balls. So although the steady heart-ache had gone, odd still moments had the old power to make her miss Jerry poignantly.

Thus the winter and the spring and half of the summer

passed—days so identical and dull that not even the unexpected happened. But August brought another urgent letter from Sallie saying that her father was not very well, that she missed young companionship, that she needed Persis. Again, wouldn't Persis come?

CHAPTER XXVI

THE need was what brought Persis to terms. The following week she set out for New Jersey and jubilantly Sallie met her in New York. "The terrible town!" How the screaming medley of the City, the undulating streets, and the thundering traffic beat in on her ears, so long accustomed to the quiet noises of Tinkham! Twenty-third Street, exposed by the summer emigration of New York fashionables to the onslaught of Fourteenth Street crowds, eager for promotion to new parade grounds, almost overawed her with its conglomerate styles. Then a short trip on the boat, and the low lulling music of the sea after the clear resonant songs of the inland hills!

The Howe cottage sat in the lap of a sand depression. Directly in front of it sand-dunes, scantily clothed with rasping, rushy grasses, gradually formed a hillock that hid the immediate view of the ocean not eighty feet away, tantalisingly, while it made a sounding board for the lapping of the waves or the boom of the surf, as weather and wind dictated. From either end of the cottage piazza, in the "pagoda-grain-elevator" extension, free wide vistas of beach and ocean swept up and down the coast.

The first Sunday after Persis's arrival Sallie took her over the sand-dunes for a morning's sunning and soothing by the sea. They both wore white linen sailor suits and looked uncommonly girlish and comely. With bits of drift-wood they scooped hollows out of the bank and lay down in the glistening sand at peace with the world and each other. For some time Persis had been trying to adjust herself to the fact that with the note of mystery something very enlivening and interesting had passed out of Sallie's entertainment. She marvelled that the

fabulous Jim Kimberley could have afforded quite so much spice, given quite so much zest to their friendship. Some note of expectancy, a dash of something irrational but charming, had certainly passed out of their intercourse; there were even times when odd unemployed hours lay flat on their hands. She knew, of course, that this dulness was merely the reaction from ten years of irrationalities and extravagant absurdities; and despite staleness, she was grateful that the new conditions were at least honest.

On this particular Sunday morning the sea had a repressed, suave manner like that of an exceedingly nervous being, who, trying to be pleasant, curbs his inner restlessness only half-well and then merely to discharge it with accumulated force later on. A squadron of sail boats flecked the bay, and some, grown reckless in the blandness of the day, had ventured out beyond the bay line for a taste of deep-sea sailing. A mile farther down the beach at a popular summer resort (a swarm of pavilions, booths, colour and humanity) masses of bathers splashed and frolicked in the surf.

Presently a quick, sure step struck the board walk that ran between the sand-dunes and the cottage, and Sallie, sharp-eyed and alert for sounds, announced, "That's Calvin Darrach's step!" She raised herself on one elbow, peering over a mound, "I invited him down to spend the day—father always enjoys him so!"

Persis started, despite the morning's calm, flicked the sand from her lap, and arranged her skirts properly. She was a bit vexed with Sallie for springing a guest without notification. She sat up and bound some becomingly stray wisps of copper-brown hair down with replaced hairpins. "Why didn't you tell me he was coming to-day so I could be prepared to meet him?" she asked. Then she realised how silly her remark was, for why should she need any preparation to meet Calvin Darrach?

On came the footsteps, and ignoring the question Sallie scrambled over the dunes to meet Calvin, giving him a royal welcome, as she knew so well how to do. Persis arose holding herself rigidly; she dreaded to meet him, searching among a confusion of words for one that should convey her sorrow for him while it cast no cloud. Not finding any and seeing him there before her, a stately black figure with big extended hand, she said nothing and merely gave him her own.

"Ah—an unexpected pleasure: Sallie did not tell me you were on this way. I had thought of you as up in the wilds of Massachusetts. It's good to see you looking so—" he had meant to be natural and say "well and strong," but instead he came so near saying "beautiful" that he halted and did not finish his greeting. The past, too, was strong upon him—the ghosts of other times were flitting between and around them. Their paths had led so literally over new-made graves. They stood so a moment, her white gown outlining her fineness and etherealising her grief, while it threw his mourning garments into full contrast. He wore a black suit of some light-weight summer material which set off his splendid physique and height handsomely. Persis, conscious of his personal appearance as well as of his loss, thought that she had never seen him look so distinguished and fine. For by its very nearness to us death chastens, albeit leaving no sharp regret or sudden blight in its wake. And, too, he looked strangely younger than she had ever seen him before. She wondered if this impression of youth were the result of his clothes, or the reaction of freedom from petty bondage?

Meanwhile Sallie was trying to break the high tension by asking simultaneously if they preferred to sit on the beach, return to the cottage, sail, or bathe. But as neither of them heard her or replied, she settled the matter herself by adding, "Calvin looks hot and thirsty from his walk down from the train. Both of you follow me, and while you are paying due

tribute to father and his pagoda, I'll see that Nora serves you the best cool stuff you ever put in your mouths!"

The spell of gloom once broken, Calvin protested that he would rather look at the ocean. So they all sat down in the sand, Sallie keeping up a stream of chatter. Calvin asked permission to light a cigarette, and rested so a moment, his long arms wound around his high knees, his straw hat beside him, his face thrust forward into the sunshine, puffing whiffs of smoke lazily across the hot, quiet air. Suddenly he jumped up, insisting that neither of the girls could be absolutely comfortable until he had converted the inhospitable hummocks into luxuriant bunks for them. So he began vigourously to demolish about half of the dune, scooping it up in his great hands, until they each had a splendid sand pile to rest against. The picture of him playing there in the sand, creating his excuse to dig and get close to the earth, renewed her impression of his rejuvenescence, and she laughed merrily at him for working so hard and so unnecessarily in the hot sun. Sallie took up the issue, bettered it with her wit, enlarging on the excellence of the cool potion in her ice-box, until they both grew thirsty and begged her to lead them to the cottage.

Mr. Howe was taking a nap, and after Sallie had had her way with the pitcher and tumblers, she produced her fob, exclaiming, "There is just time for a bath before dinner! Calvin, I know you will enjoy a dip in the big puddle before your lobster and water-cresses. And Persis—run and get into your bathing suit at once, like a good obedient child!"

"Thank you, Sallie! You always did know how to lead up to a good dinner. By Jove! it has just occurred to me that I forgot to bring my bathing togs! What shall I do?"

"Go to that window-seat there and poke around until you find your fit. We always keep extras for forgetful youngsters like you."

Meanwhile Persis had not moved. "If you'll excuse me,

Sallie, I think I'll not swim to-day. I have some letters to write." Then instantly she regretted her refusal, feeling sure that it must seem nothing but prudishness; but as Sallie did not repeat her invitation, and as Calvin was too busy finding his bathing suit to urge her, she was forced to stand by her choice, and wishing them a good plunge, passed on upstairs. From the front guest-room windows and over the tops of the sand-dunes she could watch Calvin and Sallie wading out into the surf, the beauty of their bodies and vitality diverting her attention from the note-paper in her lap. If Mrs. Hanchett found Persis's letter somewhat dull and disjointed, it was because its writer was trying to pry far enough into the future to discover whether she must watch Calvin Darrach and Sallie Howe take the years together as joyously, hand in hand, as they were now taking the breakers.

Dinner finished, they all collected again on the piazza, and after Sallie had passed cigars to her father and Calvin, she opened up her line of conversation with "And how's the Babe? And when is she coming to visit her cousin Sallie?"

Calvin had deeply niched himself in the hollow of a big chair, his long arms at rest, his right ankle resting on his left knee, in the first inert enjoyment of a good shore dinner. But the mention of his heart's desire made him emerge into an upright position and animation. He flicked an elongated ash from his cigar and replied, "Ah, don't start me off! The Babe is perfect—not a flaw in her! She's the most adorable bit of mortality that could possibly cross a man's orbit—the top of life! Thank you, she will come to visit you, accompanied by her nurse, as soon as you return from the shore. If I were urged a bit, I might come along, too,"

Immediately Persis arose, and begging to be excused a moment, went up to her room. When she returned she had two letters in her hand and explained that she wished to mail them at the post-office. Calvin laid his cigar end-to on the

edge of a table and stood up with courtly mien. "I should like to mail your letters for you. Won't you let me take them?" he said.

"Thank you—I'm afraid you wouldn't know where to find our post-office."

He smiled indulgently. He looked so thoroughly the kind of a man who does find what he sets out for, that she saw how inane she had been.

"Then perhaps you'll permit me to walk along with you while you make the sagacious discovery yourself?"

It occurred to Sallie that the real sagacity would enter with Calvin's offer to take the letters when he went home and mail them in New York; but she did not feel called upon to say so. Meanwhile Persis, stammering something about the pleasure such an arrangement would give her, turned to Sallie appealingly. "Come too, Sallie! We may both of us need you for a pilot."

"Ah, now it's my turn to be excused! Yonder up the board walk approaches my cock-sparrow man. He gives me a sail Saturday and I give him a tea-party Sunday. If anything should break the continuity of this lifelong habit of mine, I imagine the wrench would do my nervous system considerable violence. Run on now, both of you," she added with a shooing gesture, "and hurry back to our tea-party."

She gave them both a little parental shove out of the door, and just as they turned by the sand-dunes called after them warningly, "Come home by way of the beach, children! And each of you bring an armful of drift-wood. That's the only tribute I require of my guests—in case it's chilly to-night."

So they left Sallie to her own devices and went off together, which, after all, was quite what she had been trying to bring about.

"Curse these ramshackly walks!" Calvin growled, as he shoved his toe under a loose board and saved himself from

tripping up only by undignified contortions. "Would you mind taking to the sand? It always makes me irritable to have some seaside syndicate or contractor dictate to me where I'll walk when I'm in God's good free outdoors."

She went with him down to where the sand lay level and packed, wondering what she should say to him that would be adequate without being emotional. But he relieved her of all responsibility by exclaiming, "How I wish you could see my Babe! For a lass of only fourteen months she is a marvel! You who love beauty so would love her, I know."

It was impossible not to react to such joyous enthusiasm. She looked up at him responsively, longingly. "Instead I should covet her," she said. Then realising how much of herself she had revealed, she looked away into the sea, as if to drown her embarrassment. It was the first time he had ever heard her give expression to any instinct of the kind, although often her brooding moods, her restless hands, and the strength of his own parental instincts had made him sure of hers.

Instead of trying to hide her confusion, clumsily, he challenged it by adding, very tenderly, "Envy brings nothing but new blight. Don't covet her! Wait, and let me share her with you."

There was a vastness of something in his manner and words that kindled and disconcerted her. A great shyness overtook her; she felt uncertain as to whether she was expected to give them the personal interpretation or not. His speech was exceedingly personal; but it might also be ambiguous. She reflected that although Calvin Darrach was seldom diffuse, he was always generous; he could hardly help sharing whatever he had. So she ignored any intimate meaning, and still gazing into the sea, replied, "Thank you—it's like you to be generous. But you'll need her—all to yourself."

"I have never been keen for keeping treasures all to myself," he said, a trifle haughtily, as if she had somehow undervalued

him. "I think it a far greater joy to divide than to accumulate. Don't you find it so, too?"

He was pushing her so far and so fast across new regions, that she felt like crying out for help, or running away from him. She wished that Sallie had come with them, and was vexed with herself for not having insisted on it. To free herself from his concentrating, commanding presence became paramount with her. A light breeze had sprung up out of the waves, which began to charge up the beach, heralding high tide. She was grateful to it for fanning her hot temples, grateful to the waves for outroaring the noise in her heart.

With total irrelevancy, which she hoped he would take as her unwillingness to further discuss just what she did think on all matters of dividing, she announced, "I'm going back to Tinkham next week."

He eyed her, curiously. "So you prefer to go on embalming yourself in the high, dry air of a little provincial town." He stated no alternative, neither did he give his voice the rising inflection. He merely made the declaration about her, adding, a shade regretfully, "There are so many bigger places in life to be filled!"

She turned to him flamingly. "You are always insinuating that I don't amount to anything! You are very unjust to me. It isn't my fault that I'm shelved in Tinkham—I'm sure I should like to be somebody splendid. But I am not like the superior creatures—women who never need to be helped a bit. I have to be led out—sometimes I need a good push. When I see the chance to do what I can do well, I shall be so very glad to quit loafing."

He enjoyed her little flash of temper: it vitalised her calm so! He had hard work to keep down the twinkle in his own eyes while he watched hers snap. He was struck, too, with the length of her speech. It was probably the longest communication she had ever made to him. Always, aside from her preëminent

beauty, which captivated and held him physically, he had been conscious that his imagination was fervidly piqued and appeased by two others of her characteristics—her magnetism and her static repose. Where other women had fascinated him by expressing their personalities, by the free play of their moods and their charms, he had always found that she had stimulated his tastes by her magnetic immobility, by what she did not do. She had, too, such a gift of silence, and knew so well when to apply it!

Her seeming placidity had never deceived him: he had always felt the glow beneath the chill of her demeanour. He had always known that her muteness and stillness were merely assumed, a foil for a nature that cried out and ached for sympathy, that pulsated and flamed with impulse. Yet he was equally certain that her reason always sat in judgment over her, that her intelligence was ever screaming from the housetops of her impulses restraint and deliberation. She was always trying to wrap herself around with a mantle of dignity and correctness; but through it he had always seen the sheen of her simplicity and childishness. And just as without her impulses she would have been cold, so without her childishness she would have been stiff and severe.

They had now reached the shallow little enclosure marked "Post-office." "What an infernally long way to come every time you want to communicate with the world: It reminds me of Tinkham! Give me the great city, where things happen! Since I've carried your letters so far, shan't I take them back with me and mail them in New York?"

"Thank you, that would be fine."

They turned back along the sandy pavement, and for a time silence fell. He was giving her a chance to unruffle her temper. He felt a bit in need of a quieter himself, and produced a pack of cigarettes. "May I smoke?"

"You may, but where is your pipe? That is the second

cigarette you've smoked to-day, and you know how vicious they are!"

He could not refrain from smiling at her estimate of the viciousness contained in two cigarettes. It reminded him of the hygienic principle behind her servings of hot milk. But he was glad to have her take even this slight care of him and said, "I keep cigarettes to proclaim the fact that I'm visiting. I keep my pipe for solid home comfort. I like the small distinctions in life, you see."

She stopped to gather up some greenish rusty bits of driftwood, and one of her side combs tumbled out on the sand. He bent over and got it, and before she could protest replaced it gently in her hair.

"Have you nothing in mind that does especially appeal to you as something you could do well?" he finally asked.

"Yes, I have thought of going back to the East Side and taking up some kind of hospital work, or district nursing."

"Why the East side? Why not Bentley Hospital?" He watched her very closely and tenderly, to make sure whether his words were painful to her, whether he might go on. Everything about her remained unchanged, and he felt that he might proceed. "Once you promised that you would help me with the Hospital all you could. Would it be too impossible for you to help me now?"

Her eyes met his bravely, but around her mouth the expression saddened.

"No," she said.

"You've no idea how we do need a good Superintendent!" Wily Calvin! He had shrewdly guessed that she would not hold out in the face of any well defined need. "I've had detestable luck trying to find one! The good ones won't put up with the meddlesome committee women picking and bickering all the time. The poor ones I will not have on the place. But at our last annual board meeting we had a general sifting out;

we've put the executive side into fewer hands. Whoever comes next will find the ground much easier to work. You know all the quirks and turns of the Bentleyites! You'd be just the one to get your own rights and the best results, without treading on anybody's toes!"

She gave him no answer, and he went on, urgently, eagerly, "You've had splendid hospital training! Your college work will fit you for the instruction and classes, and you know so well what nurses need! It has always seemed to me that a Superintendent should know how to conserve and mother her nurses, as well as to train and work them. And besides," he added persuasively, "I should so enjoy having you in Bentley again!"

For just the fraction of a second it flashed over her that Calvin was trying to get her back to Bentley on his own account. She looked at him craftily; his eyes met hers frankly, calmly, and his manner indicated that of a man making a sober business deal rather than that of a lover. So she experienced the chagrin of the woman who reads more in a man's words and demeanour than he intends she should.

Here at last was the opportunity to escape from her ennui, herself. Here was a choice between drifting and clockwork. The old call of hospital life, as subtile in the blood of those who care for it at all as the call of the woods to the trapper, urged her to accept. The appeal was the stronger because, remembering several needed reforms in hospital routine, she rejoiced in the opportunity to effect two or three. Recalling, too, the pomposities of the she-dragon at the General Hospital, she decided on several very definite things that she would not do. Then her heart called out that she could never work on Jerry's death scene, that she could never go back to Bentley and see the little home on the hill, without him. The next minute her heart ceased to cry, assuring her such scenes would make work ideal, would be the very inspiration of her work.

Then across her memory drifted the refrain of Luke Chamberlain's farewell to her:

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow."

But when she searched her feelings honestly, she knew that devotion to something near the sphere of her sorrow would be what would quicken her. She wondered why this was so, wherein lay the difference? Luke Chamberlain had put the ocean and a continent between himself and his sorrow, while she had about decided to go back into the midst of hers, finding in the decision a real solace. Was it the eternal difference between feminine and masculine psychology merely, or was she flying in the face of foolhardiness and fresh heartbreak? And behind all her considerings lay the strange feeling that she owed the people of Bentley something. She had been so intolerant of their peculiarities, so sparing of herself in dealing with them.

"You are offering me the opportunity to expiate some of my hatefulness to the Bentleyites," she finally said. "I did not make them a good pastor's wife. I was too much engrossed in myself and my love—I was always sadly out of touch with them."

"You were worried and suffering and haunted by a fear that proved as real as it was terrible," he amended. "No one in your place could have done a thousandth part as courageously!" He looked at her intently, recalling how he had watched her stand and take so submissively the supremest blow that fate has to deal a woman who loves.

"When I feel like caving in with my disappointments and hard lot, I think of you—and you make me strong."

She looked up at him, a world of gratitude in her beautiful

sad eyes. To hear him, a brave man, say that he had leaned on her for courage to go on, gave her a new exultant joy. He met her look once more, and held it steadily. And they both saw in each other a person who had trumphed over self and sorrow. Something electric and victorious sprang up between them, like the thrill and rejoicing of those returning from great tribulation.

The tide boomed like bass drums in the orchestration of mighty music. The swish of sea-weed and shells and back-wash took up the melody, and the breeze transposed it into a low song. The sun dipped behind a cloud, and the windy spray settled on their cheeks caressingly like a moist kiss.

"Must I decide now?" she whispered, after their silence had ceased to palpitate. He knew that in her heart she had affirmed her decision already; also he knew how necessary it was to her nature to go gradually, cautiously.

"No! Take all the time you need deciding—only come! The hospital needs you so!" But his eyes and his smile and his hands and his body spoke for him, telling her that it was himself that needed her most—he and the Babe.

He glanced down over her, and his yearning grew to exultation, in that he had at last seen the beginning of her emergence from remoteness. He knew that her soul glowed for him because he saw the reflection of it in her face: her pallor had become radiance. The sea wind blew her garments about her, revealing to him her beauty, eloquent and prophetic through riches of new associations. She strode on beside him in splendid rhythm with his steps, stately, majestic—and free. She halted suddenly and with one of her winsome smiles exclaimed, "See how indolent you are! Hold out your strong arms while I pile them full of drift for Sallie!"

He smiled, obeying her, glad of her orders, feeling so sure they would never descend below life's highest pleasure. He watched her bend deftly to gather up his load for him, and

elevated his arms a bit higher in order to get the supple grace of her waist as she stretched to reach them.

When they came to the sand-dunes he turned to her with "I forgot to tell you that the Superintendent of Bentley Hospital has been asked to resign the first of October. Shall I deposit your woodpile on the front porch, or is there a fireplace?"

They found Sallie at the end of one pagoda, behind a jalousie, cosily serving lemon and tea to her suitor. Her eye was quick to catch the light on their faces, and she reflected that probably while Calvin Darrach had brought Persis a heart full of love, he had brought her an armful of drift-wood. A sudden sense of loss and extinction came over her—a fresh realisation of the cross-purposes of life, of the disparity between Calvin and the cock-sparrow man. But since it was her principle to never be long downcast over anything, she consoled herself by thinking of Nellie's fate, and offered the newcomers tea.

After chatting pleasantly for a short time Calvin arose and buttoned his double-breasted coat about him snugly. He was more like a man girding himself for action, than for protection against mid-summer weather. "Good-by, Sallie—I'm off! Let me thank you for an exceptionally happy day. Say good-by to your father for me—won't you?" And he looked around for his hat.

"Don't go, Calvin! Stay and have supper with us—please!"

"Thank you—your tea-party will tide me over till I get home. The Babe expects me, you know. We always have a frolic before she goes to sleep."

"You can't make it—see what time it is! Better to stay than to miss the Babe and us, too."

"Ah, but I plan closer than that! My car is waiting in Newark now. I shall just make it."

Her face clouded, and he turned to shake hands with the suitor. Brightening, she tried again. "Calvin—we're going

to have the grandest drift-wood fire—pretty green lights and the swish of the sea—we'll sit on the beach and tell ghost stories. Do stay!"

He smiled wistfully. "The Babe expects me," he repeated. "She knows who puts two jubes under her pillow every night. She'd feel hurt if I forgot." He faced them witnessing his tenderness, unashamed of his mothering.

He shook hands all around again, keeping Persis for the last. "Good-by—I shall hope to see you soon." He sprang over the sand-dunes and swung off up the beach, whistling softly to himself. He held his head and his chest high, and his whole bearing was that of a man well pleased with his day's work.

Sallie watched him till he mingled with a crowd of promenaders and was lost; then she turned back to her tea table. "When Calvin Darrach made his hospital, he builded better than he knew," she muttered. But when Persis begged pardon and asked her what she was talking about, she replied that she had merely said it was going to be a grand night for a fire on the beach.

Just as Persis was ready to retire, she heard a tap-tap on her door, and Sallie, her face more than ordinarily whimsical in the light of the candle she held in one hand, softly crept in.

"Do you feel sleepy?" she drawled. "I don't!"

"No. Come in."

"Thanks! It's creepy in my room. I'll curl up here, while you brush your hair." She criss-crossed the pillows till they fitted her back, sitting with her knees drawn up under her chin.

"It piqued me," she announced. "Didn't it you?"

"What?"

"That I couldn't keep Calvin away from another female, particularly since said female is only fourteen months old! I tried—hard, too." There was a sad note of defeat in her voice, and her head drooped on her knees.

Persis gave her hair a long, dextrous stroke and replied calmly, "No. Because I did not try."

Whereupon Sallie blushed deeply because she had given away so easily that she had tried. Then with one of her lively turns of confidence and frankness she said, "I've tried hard for a whole year—and it's no use! Probably I've never worked so hard in all my life! Cal isn't interested in any woman but you. And finally when I knew nothing could ever change him, that I could never win him myself, I decided to just pitch in and help him out all I could. That's why I invited you down." She waited for the tall figure before the mirror, back to her, to make some recognition of such generosity. At last, with a piteous little catch in her voice she added, "It was downright magnanimous of me—though nobody seems to notice it! Because I cared."

Persis laid down her brush and came to sit beside her. "Poor Sallie—it really is too hard," she said.

A few tears straggled down the small, droll face. Then she wiped them off with the sleeve of her night gown, smiled, and said cheerily, "I simply won't worry, you know! And there are worse fates than being a nice old maid. Think of Nell!"

In a moment she regained her airiness. "Cal really is too lovely! The one combination that has always captivated my fancy is a young man left with a babe in arms. It's *so* dramatic —so supremely picturesque!"

"I fail to see anything so artificial in his situation. To me there is positively a tragic element in his joy. Think what it means for a man to bring up a girl baby! If it were a boy 'twouldn't be half so pitiful."

Whereupon something like a wink flitted across Sallie's left eye. "What did Calvin mean when he said he hoped to see you soon?" she asked pointedly.

"He means that he hopes I'll decide to go to Bentley as Superintendent of Nurses at the Hospital. He has offered me the position."

"Ah!" Sallie lingered on the vowel. "And shall you go?"

"I don't know—'twould be so very hard in many ways. Then again it would even things up a bit. I really do owe the Bentleyites something."

"Nonsense! I never heard such poppycock. Can't you ever enjoy anything—even your freedom—without the 'pay, pay, pay'?"

Persis turned to her. "There is just one thing that keeps me from enjoyment now, Sallie! And it's this. It has been such a struggle to say it! How my haughty spirit has rebelled! But I just can't go back to Tinkham without parting with it." She slipped down on her knees and laid her head against Sallie's shoulder. The largeness and richness of her mood of the afternoon was still with her; moreover, when the grace of reconciliation and forgiveness did come to favour her, she knew how to accept and humour it.

"I want you to know," she went on passionately, "that I do forgive the—the lie. I want us to be friends, always—just like we used to be! You've been generous of friendship—I've been so stingy! From now on I'd like to balance things a bit more evenly."

"I don't want you to give me anything," Sallie sobbed. "Just treat me as if I were your equal—that's all."

Persis continued. "Nobody is perfect, Sallie—it was never meant that we should be, else conditions would have been made perfect for us. It was my fault that I expected so much of everybody! The great art lies, dear, in taking people as you find them, believing the best of them. The greatest art of all lies in going right on believing the best of them—even when they fail you."

"I shall never fail you again, Persis. It hurts me too much! Let's be friends when we're real old," she acquiesced, cosily. "Let's go to matinees to celebrate our birthdays, and wear white lace caps with violet ribbons on them! And when our

gouty knees refuse to wiggle under us, let's be pussy-cats before a grate fire, do tatting, and discuss the days we could gad about! Let's shake on it," she added cordially.

After a while she resumed. "It's really uncanny how I can foresee the future! That day at my Thanksgiving dinner, when I took such pains to seat you beside Calvin, I knew that a terrible mistake had been made somewhere. I didn't at all see how we were going to dispose of poor Jerry and Nell—fate saw to all of that!—but it was daylight clear to me that you and Cal were made for each other." She waited, wishing, hoping that Persis would contradict her. But the silence only told her what she already knew—that her friend was too sincere to gainsay truth. In a moment, more subdued than was Sallie's wont, she added, "And fate is a strange thing."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE following Thursday Persis returned to Tinkham. There were white uniforms to be made, good-bys to be said, and the Hanchetts to be won over; that she had so turned the course of her year and a half with them that leave-taking would evoke a mutual sadness now became a gratification to her. And behind all these homely, human motives lay the deep, real feeling that she could not go back into the world again without the last tender message of the dear New England hills.

She had arranged to land in Bentley at night, trusting to the kindly darkness to spare her the shock of association. She took up her quarters in the part of the hospital farthest away from Piety Hill; she made new walks and jaunts for herself beyond the factory sites in the opposite end of the town, near the Palisades. Then came the deluge of work; the fall crop of sickness, organised reforms, accidents, operations, class instruction, and new recruits to train in. So busy was she with the work that lay at her hand that at times it seemed far-fetched and unreal that Bentley had ever meant anything to her beyond her profession. Then again she would glance up at the little stucco parsonage—another young minister was there now; and the children romping over Piety Hill, the express carts and doll carriages on the front porch, would draw her back into the past, till profession and work and everything else but Jerry became a mockery.

Many of the Bentleyites called on her, Elder Gaylord first of all. He sat in the stiff reception room at the hospital, and stroked his silk hat nervously and blew his lean nostrils the while he assured her of the deep respect he entertained for her

display of character, his admiration of her courage. She knew now that what had seemed to her persecution was merely the elder's fidgety expression of his duty toward his church. Then came Miss Atwood with her chenille boa, her mouse-coloured ear-locks grown sparser and grayer, bespeaking the wear and tear of two years of zealous canvassing; but her little black eyes were still undimmed with the fire of missionary ardour, and her endearments, her exhortations for Mrs. Wadhams to join the noble work were as fervid as ever. All her odd moments and extra time Persis put in bettering, amusing, mothering the Children's Ward. Not one of the eighteen beds was ever empty long. Calvin Darrach saw to this! There were those observant ones on the hospital board who commented that, aside from the applications, Darrach went out in the byways and hedges and scoured around for automobile loads of puny, sickly, unfortunate children, thus running up hospital expenses foolishly and unnecessarily. But since he was their most liberal contributor to hospital funds, the matter of recruits to the Children's Ward never became an issue of administration.

One crisp, bright morning in December she heard him throttle his car at the main entrance. She sat at her office desk re-arranging class schedules, and answered the rap on her door with a "come in." He asked if things were running smoothly, if any exciting cases had been entered lately, if he could do anything for her: her white uniform, her new patent leather ties, high collar, and deep cuffs so emphasised her correctness that he instinctively kept on very business ground. "How many patients from the Children's Ward will you permit me to take for an outing this morning? I have an hour and a quarter before I start for New York."

She smiled, knowing what a jaunt in "the big choo-choo" meant to the convalescents. "I'm not sure," she said. "Please wait, and I'll ask the house doctor."

Her bits of hospital etiquette and policy always amused him: long since her calm judgment and tact had become the only hospital law he recognised much. The decrees of the embryo doctors who rolled cigarettes and played poker in the drug room he had never placed in the same class with her wisdom.

Presently she appeared. "You may take six," she said.

He strode out to his car, returning with arms full. "Poor little devils," he muttered. "Give these to those who can't go, please." And he deposited a huge bag of oranges on a table.

"And now tell me, in the light of your large experience," (he had never forgotten his first impression of her at the New York General Hospital) "what would be the very nicest toy I could get for the Children's Ward Christmas present—something fine, if you please—something that will give them more pleasure than anything else in the world."

She stood a moment, the very serious side of her uppermost; in her thoughtful moods he had always found something of the brooding melancholy of mountaineers.

"A music box," she finally said, with a triumphant smile: "A big one, soft toned—with no militant, martial music, but lots of sweet, happy tunes—childish and soothing. At the General I was compelled to use one that played 'Wacht am Rhein' and the 'Marseillaise!' But I shall not worry lest you make such a mistake."

"Thank you." He turned to escort his troop of guests to the car, and came back to say with a bright confidence," I've ordered a magnificent Christmas tree for the children—the best I could find! Would you have time to oversee the trimming of it? I have a reason for wanting everything especially fine this year."

His enthusiasm was infectious. She smiled, saying "I'll make time." It struck her as very odd that Calvin Darrach was devoted to the Children's Ward because he had a child of

his own, while her devotion sprang from the fact that she was childless. And then she reflected that the sources of motives were inconsequential compared with their results. She stood by the window watching him tuck in the stowaways; there was still room for one more. Dashing up a side entrance to the men's ward he appeared leading along an old paralytic soldier, and soon had him hoisted onto the front seat. Off they sprang, and turning back to her desk she interspersed her class schedule with the thought of how like Calvin it was to let no available chance for pleasure go wasted.

With the holiday season came the exposure to winter sicknesses that filled the hospital with patients and work. And behind the extra preparation for holiday celebrations, that every patient might feel the Christmas gladness, was the output of the spirit of giving, until Persis wondered whence came her power to work so hard and accomplish so much. In the old days at Bentley she had worked so grudgingly: now she worked with a tireless ardour. Was it the difference between forced and voluntary service, she wondered? Coercion had ever fretted her proud soul.

On Christmas morning she stood stringing the last popcorn ropes and tying spangles on the children's tree. At its base were stacked baskets of fruit, a toy apiece, and some picture books. A little flock of wan-faced, wondrous-eyed convalescents clustered about her, and down the ward the sicker babies sat peeking through the bars of their cribs, eyes glued on the beautiful lady and the pretty tree. Over the ward hung the hush of awe and frailty, and every low note from the music box, presented the evening before, passed sweetly from crib to crib. She heard a "Merry Christmas" behind her, and turned to find Calvin regarding his special premises from the doorway. He came over to where she was beside the tree. "A Merry Christmas to you!" he repeated. "What an ideal Mrs. Santa Claus you make with your snowy gown and that sprig of

holly in your belt! I fancy I hear your reindeer champing behind the screen."

She returned his holiday greeting. "You yourself are much too modern for reindeer! I saw a car flash past a moment ago. From the way it was loaded I knew it was yours. Do you approve of my tree?"

"I approve of everything you do! Is there any child here so sick he can't enjoy his Christmas?"

"Yes, there are two."

"Which ones?"

"I had them put in the corner beds and screened away from the possible excitement."

"Will you show them to me?"

She gave her handful of baubles to the head nurse and went with him to where the flushed cheeks and laboured breath bespoke pneumonia.

"Poor little chaps! will they pull through?"

"I think so—they're straight cases."

He walked around to the opposite side of the crib, so that he faced her. Then he compelled her eyes with the magnetic splendour of his own. "Do you remember the foundling's corner crib in your other ward?" he asked.

Something ticked in her throat, but she replied quietly, "I do."

"Had you any idea, I wonder, of what I thought of you then?" She did not attempt to tell him, neither did he give her time to speak. "I thought you the most beautiful, tender womanly girl I had ever even dreamed of. And I think so to this day!"

Her lips felt hot and her hands felt cold, while she hastened to shut out his gaze by lowering her eyelids. There was a bustle of starched uniform coming, but it halted half-way down the ward. He lowered his voice and bent over nearer to her, across the crib. The sick child moved restlessly, and he stooped to help it turn. Then he went on. "I have forced myself to wait till Christmas tide, hoping that my love might

help you bear the loneness of Christmas memories. If I knew that this were so—that I were able to bring you joy—I should be the proudest, happiest man in the United States."

He waited for her response, and probably for the first time in her life in the face of intense feeling, she had no response. She stood silent and tremulous, and he began again to plead his case.

"Is it so selfish of me to ask you to renounce eighteen babes for only one? Ah, Persis: I can find another superintendent for my hospital, but I can never find another superintendent for my home and heart."

She was keeping him so conspicuously long behind the ward screens! Would she never speak up for herself?

"We need you so, dear—the Babe and I!" He had won her over once by ringing the changes on that word "need," and resorted to it now, urgently, in the face of a hungrier, mightier want. "The Babe needs you most, because at best a father's love is a poor thing for the soul of a girl child. I need you because my home and my heart are empty and lonely. I need you to make my life whole, Persis—to repay me for the things I have missed. The Babe has waited a year and a half for you. And I—sometimes think I have waited for you a lifetime."

His words were becoming very regnant with her. In after years, when enough time had accumulated to give a perspective to their life united, she recalled that this last plea of his was the only reference he had ever made to what she had always felt so sure of—that Nellie had not filled and gratified his life. To hear him confess his heart-hunger, to be able to give him what he had never enjoyed, to have the power "to make his life whole"—was there any more abiding glory in life for her?

The ward sounds went on about them, and across her silence came the strains of the music box.

> Hush, my child, lie still and slumber,
> Holy angels guard thy bed.

He looked at her yearningly, as if a bit fearful, at last, of what her muteness might portend. Then he made his last heroic plea. "It would be such a triumph over our pasts, Persis!—over our delayed hopes, and our crushing disappointments! It would be like snatching victory and happiness from the very arms of death." It was the first time he had ever let her see that he knew she had not realised all her ideals in her own marriage. He was indeed going far with her!

Then as if in reaction from the unlocking of his heart, he added mournfully and a trifle haughtily, "I shall not further urge you! Your own heart must do the rest. Perhaps you'd like to go back to the tree?"

He stopped a moment to admire the evergreens, to wish each of the nurses a Merry Christmas, and to fondle a gray-eyed child. And then he was gone.

The holidays passed, winter relaxed into spring, and still Calvin's days remained one long, unbroken stretch of suspense. Equally, Persis found time hanging drearily. Although he did not avoid her in hospital relations, she saw nothing of him elsewhere. If he was trying to make her come to terms by paying her back in her own currency of aloofness, he was certainly succeeding. She knew at last that if any yielding in their attitude came about, it must come from her. His plea for his home and his babe often echoed through her busiest hours; but just because she wanted to be so sure she was marrying him for nothing but himself, she still maintained her silence, waiting till his love call woke up an answer in the deeps of her own love. A man's home, his babe, and his heart! They were the material out of which other women had fashioned happiness for themselves since time immemorial. What more could a woman ask of destiny? Mrs. Hanchett had done it—with less. She felt the spell of home life and the helplessness of the Babe calling, calling her. But just because she had known the deep overwhelming love of a man himself, destitute of all entice-

ments, and because she believed that love was the greatest thing in the world, she kept both Calvin and herself in a state of tormenting uncertainty. And he, because he felt so sure of himself and the perfection of the fate he wanted, waited for her patiently, silently.

One April morning Persis took enough time from her duties for a promenade on a side piazza of the hospital. Looking down the street she was surprised by the sight of Sallie Howe. She was approaching languidly, slowly, and dangled a paper parcel in one hand. As Persis was making her welcome and comfortable, she asked "What is in your bundle, Sallie?"

"A 'sprise for you! 'Twas too utterly like the old days at the General! I know you have enough to eat here, but I couldn't help it! Don't laugh."

She untied a string and produced some sponge cake and a bottle of sarsaparilla.

Persis certainly did laugh. "What's the sarsaparilla for," she asked.

"Oh, that's for me, while you eat Nora's masterpiece."

"You're a dear child, Sallie! But tell me how to amuse you while I instruct my bandage class? They meet in ten minutes."

"Easy! I'll go up and call on the Babe. But I shall be back to lunch with you," she added, preparing to go. "I want to meet the house doctors—they's such cunning little boys."

When the time came for Sallie to go home, Persis accompanied her to the train. On the way Sallie turned to her knowingly with, "Something's on your mind! What's troubling you, child?"

"I'm troubled because Calvin asked me to marry him last Christmas and I haven't decided yet."

"Are you trying to tell me that it has taken you four months to accept what any other woman in the world would jump at? If he had asked me, I should have precipitated myself into his arms and refused to vacate."

"You'd do nothing so undignified, Sallie!"

"Dignity! Are you standing on dignity with such a chance for blessed joy and happiness? Really, Persis, I have no patience with you left! I should think Calvin had put up with enough from women without your tantalising, obstinate, dignified wilfulness!" She shrugged her hips and rustled along in ill-concealed disgust.

"You are always giving me advice about matrimony," Persis finally declared. "Why don't you marry, yourself? It's a waste for you to squander all your motherliness and care on waifs and casuals like me."

"Of course it is! But what would you have me do? Propose? I'll have to wait till I'm asked, won't I?" Then with more seriousness than was her wont she added, "Somehow efforts of the heart don't avail me much. The men I want love somebody else, and those who want me I won't have. The cock-sparrow man!—Isk! He may be persistent—but so am I wilful! I'll die watching 'Miss Howe' being engraved on my tombstone first!" She sighed lightly. "I should like to marry the kind of a man Jim Kimberley was. I lied about him so long that his type actually got on my nerve—I've refused two men because they were not fascinating and odd like Jim." A mournfulness shadowed her bright being, but for a moment only. She turned gayly to Persis with a smile that modified and insinuated much. "There are worse fates than being a nice old maid with plenty of money to spend. Mine for autonomy!"

She waved her hand as one does who holds a flag, and into her drawl too had come a good note of victory.

Persis, turning back from the train, decided to take some exercise. She longed to go up past the cornfield to the lookout, but courage failed her. So she crossed the centre of the town and kept to the Albany Road, trying to shake off Sallie's displeasure with her by enjoying the Hudson River. A mile

beyond the village the road swung along past a comely grove of white pines. Their silver-tipped boughs shimmered in the soft breeze, and from hidden greenery within came the staccato note of a catbird, calling querulously. Had the old world used his kind so spitefully that the complaint had become racial and eternal?

The note of discontent grew in her; her surroundings, her tactics, herself, became distateful to her. She knew that a time would come when her work would never satisfy her; already longing was beginning to let cogs slip in the wheels of her clock-like days. With a swift insight she saw that the cause of her discontent was her love for Calvin. All along she had been denying herself his love because of the much he was giving her. Now she was ready to accept his love because of what she could bring him. And chiefest was her love of him.

She had not known many friendships with men: her early engagement had precluded that. She reviewed the three men who had registered epochs in her girlish understanding of masculinity—Luke Chamberlain, Jim Kimberley, and Jerry Wadhams. And one was a Quixotic, one was a myth, and one was a maniac. It was not an array favourable to optimism or happy outcome. But being fatherless and brotherless they had been the material from which she had drawn her impressions and final estimates of men. Pitted over against them she saw Calvin Darrach, with all his demonstrated normality, his sane finenesses, and the royal sweetness of his nature. Jim Kimberley—with his ruby puppies, his ladylike letters, and his silly devilishness! She smiled to herself craftily, confident of how hard even an expert like Sallie Howe would find it to deceive her about men hereafter—so great a revelation to her had been the unfolding of Calvin's rich nature. She saw that all her early ideals had been of professional men. Well, she had run the scale: law, medicine, and the ministry! Having at last met and comprehended the big viewpoint in matters of

universal interest, the openmindedness, the large resourcefulness of the man of affairs, she was glad to feel free from early, asymmetric conceptions. And since the age in which she lived was one of business prowess, she was proud to know that the man who loved her was of the highest type of business men. She knew that she admired him because he was a man of maturing years, with all the crudities and corners of his nature rubbed off by travel and identification with people and causes and world interests. Beside his local benevolences she knew of several young men and women whom he was helping to help themselves through college; and Miss Atwood had been jubilantly announcing his contribution to found a mission station amongst the pygmies of the Stanley forest in the Kongo. And he was always planning good openings for the southern mountain boys of the Industrial School of which he was trustee. She knew that she loved him because, despite the wear and tear of business and the blows and disappointments of home life, he had still been strong and true enough to keep his ideals intact, his instincts clean, and his enthusiasm spontaneous and chivalrous as that of youth.

Her love of Calvin withdrawn, she found nothing left of herself but fragments. The trusteeship of his baby became the mainspring of her privileges and desires. The things potential with her—the things still able to give her heart-throbs—all centred around him. Companioned by him, she felt no chill of future loneliness. Her years, armoured by his love—the rest of life filtered through his hands! She asked no more of destiny. She had once heard a good man say that nobody was fit for joy who had not walked his *via dolorosa*. Hers had been long and not smooth—but it was past. All her youth had been drawn in high lights; from now on life was to be a glad noonday and a quiet after-glow with Calvin. He was the indemnity that fate was paying her.

She tramped on another mile; and then her love turned her

back toward the townscape. She wore a suit of shepherd's plaid, and the breeze blew back her long loose coat, revealing her supple young body; her black hat tilted away from her face; but now her pallor shone with an indwelling radiance. And just as we turn a night latch on doors already bolted, so her mind reinforced her heart by chanting

> We do not serve the dead—the past is past!
> God lives, and lifts his glorious mornings up
> Before the eyes of men, who wake at last,
> And put away the meats they used to sup,
> And on the dry dust of the ground outcast
> The dregs remaining of the ancient cup,
> And turn to wakeful prayer and worthy act.
> The dead, upon their awful 'vantage ground,—
> The sun not in their faces,—shall abstract
> No more our strength: we will not be discrowned
> Through treasuring their crowns, nor deign transact
> A barter of the present, in a sound,
> For what was counted good in foregone days.
> O Dead, ye shall no longer cling to us
> With your stiff hands of desiccating praise,
> And hold us backward by the garment thus,
> To stay and laud you in long virelays!
> Still, no! we will not be oblivious
> Of our own lives, because ye lived before,
> Nor of our acts, because ye acted well,—
> We thank ye that ye first unlatched the door—
> We will not make it inaccessible
> By thankings in the doorway any more,
> But will go onward to extinguish hell
> With our fresh souls, our younger hope, and God's
> Maturity of purpose.

There had been an early morning shower, and the washed air hung drying in the north wind that swept the Hudson. Just before she reached the pine grove, the Albany Road branched off to the right, dipped down one of Bentley's hills past Calvin's

home, and finally lost itself in the centre of the town. Where the road forked, on the topmost bough of a venerable pine, a bluebird delivered his message of pure gladness. Which note should she tune her future to—the thrush's rancour, or the bluebird's joy? And behind the old pine tree lurked gray shadows and a stairway, at the foot of which flitted riven hopes and fallow years.

Dominated by an impulse more masterful than had been her caution and deliberateness, she took the branch road and fairly flew along it. In a few minutes she pulled herself up to a full stop, realizing that her hat was resting on her left ear, that she was breathless with her haste to tell Calvin that she loved him and was going to marry him. Her reserve reminded her that such speed was unseemly; and she sat down on a rock to tie her shoe laces and regain her composure. A ten minutes' walk brought her to the foot of the prominence on which stood Calvin's home. A noble row of Lombardy poplars flanked the approach to it, and its style of architecture was of the Doric order, with four stately columns guarding the front entrance. All the lines of the house were straight and true; its colour was white, the doorway square, and the windows large and sunny. And just as the clothes of some people express their personalities, so, she reflected, did Calvin's home express him.

Being so near her goal now, her pace broke to a saunter, and while she was yet a little way off, Calvin appeared around the corner of the house, wheeling his baby's carriage. There was a hush about his step and attitude that told her the Babe slept. One expressive hand rested on the perambulator, and the other held a brier pipe, at which he took infrequent whiffs. His eyes were downcast, his head slightly forward, his shoulders a bit stooped; and all about him was an invisible grayness—a trace of sadness and low spirits that touched her as nothing of his buoyancy could have done. Picturesque! Sallie's definition of him, circumstanced by death with the care of a helpless babe,

flashed over her again. Instead, she saw him a man of lonely heart, broadly, sanely, sensitively human, with tenderest human needs. She stood, statuesque, watching him, longing to efface the distance between them, dreading to break the spell of her revelation.

Then a tearless cry of struggle went up, and two small fists and a foot flourished over the side of the wicker carriage. Calvin started from his revery, stuffed his pipe into his hip pocket guiltily, and bending over, lifted the small protest to his shoulder. Supporting her with one hand, he stroked the wrinkles from her dainty gown, and she, grateful to be taken up, laid one hand across his lips and her face against his. Then with slow sure feet he carried her up the granite steps, into the house.

Persis felt her heart strings tighten: it was so exactly as if they did not want her! But her love would not let her turn back, and while she stood so, helpless, the shoulder-straps of a nurse passed the hall window, and presently through the opened door Calvin appeared again, with the Babe perched on his shoulder. The April sunshine lingered on him and the whiteness of the small gown—and this time he saw her.

A rare smile lit up his countenance, and whispering something to the Babe, he held her high up and away from him, facing her toward his love. The Babe jumped and sprang in his arms, as if something very delightful were happening, and on they came past the tall poplars, to meet the lady.

"At last, Persis! I see it on your lips and in your eyes. Even the Babe sees it! Watch her greet you." The mite gurgled and wriggled with joy, and put out both arms to be taken. For a moment she rested against Persis's hungry heart, while Calvin stood gazing down on his two treasures, the child of his old and the woman of his new love.

"See how she welcomes you," he said, emotion vibrant in his low voice.

As if in high approval of her father's words, the Babe set her lips and her breath against Persis's cheek, then fluttered back to her father's arms. And up the hill, past the Lombardy poplars, into the home they all went together.

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